Raf Rennie is a graphic designer from Toronto. *Modern Nostalgic Fantasies*, is a collection of texts about politics, virtuality, science-fiction and design written between 2014 and 2016 as Rennie's MFA thesis. This edition has been updated with additional texts not included in the original publication.

FOLK POLITICAL ASTRONAUT

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

What does a scanner see? I mean, really see? Into the head? Down into the heart? Does a passive infrared scanner like they used to use or a cube-type holo-scanner like they use these days, the latest thing, see into me—into us —clearly or darkly? I hope it does, he thought, see clearly, because I can't any longer these days see into myself. I see only murk. Murk outside; murk inside. I hope, for everyone's sake, the scanners do better. Because if the scanner sees only darkly, the way I myself do, then we are cursed, cursed again and like we have been continually, and we'll wind up dead this way, knowing very little and getting that little fragment wrong too.

In this city, everyone is like a God. You don't have to move
an inch to see images far removed, or to touch things that
aren't there and access other realities that are there. It's
just that these Gods don't do anything. If the Gods won't
do it then the people will. Sooner or later, we'll find out.

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself
in it like an object. What is realised in my history is not
the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even
the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the
future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in
the process of becoming. Meaning is produced not only
by the relationship between the signifier and the signified
but also, crucially, by the position of the signifiers in relation
to other signifiers.

"Playing" is not simply a pastime, it is the primordial basis of imagination and creation. Truth be told, Homo Ludens (Those who Play) are simultaneously Homo Faber (Those who Create). Even if the earth were stripped of life and reduced to a barren wasteland, our imagination and desire to create would survive—beyond survival, it would provide hope that flowers may one day bloom again. Through the invention of play, our new evolution awaits.

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1, When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong. 2, The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible. 3, Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.
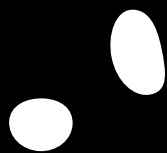
PROLOGUE

I WANT TO GO FASTER
The punctum of desire. I want a lot, perhaps I want it all.
To slip in and out of characters seamlessly.
To move, unnoticed, through people.

I WANT TO BE ELECTRIC
Between the moon and here, distance is of no meaning.
Folded and folded over as soft silk. A Pepper's Ghost upon
an aggressive lack, dancing on fog and dust.

I WANT TO SLEEP
I extrapolate, as a fractal, infinitely awake, moving, and
working. Parsed into fibers strung taut. Solar static noise,
cell reception.

I WANT LOVE
Perhaps I want it all.

I started awhile ago trying to explore my own identity
online, and my lack there of due to its constant change
and malleability. I am far from forward on the subject as
there have been such a boom in texts on the topic. One
the of most interesting of which is the Marx laced thesis
of Jonah Peretti, creator of the popular site *Buzzfeed*. In his
text he explores how capitalism empties cultures and there-
fore cultural identities, removing meaning from them.
These emptied identities are perfect vessels for people to
slip in and out of, prefabricated identities. These benefit
capitalism as to be able to constantly redefine the person,
a state of constant flux on the personal level to match the
systemic state of flux that capitalism functions on. While
academic texts often sit around as merely theory-based
hypotheticals, Jonah decided to apply what he had learned,
not in critique, but using his insight he created *Buzzfeed*,
a system for this quick consumption of culture and signi-
fies of identity. The venture, while originally opposed to

capitalism, fit nicely into it's system and has been very profitable for Jonah.

Further writing that has been coming out follows along the same lines. There is a prevailing thought that the internet is best constructed to remove identity from us. That is that "us" as an identifiable individual becomes less individualized. There's something more in this than the internet but a history in the act of reading, of texts, the language the internet still primarily functions on. While reading a novel we tend to take on characteristics of the lead character, or the character we most identify with. Our individuality becomes mixed with our interactions with these characters. Online everyone takes on the role as a character. We are expressed through quotes, texts, statuses, tweets, we become less a person but the abstract representation of one, much like a fictional character. It has thus been proven that we take on the characteristics of the people we most converse and interact with online. The web is an amalgamation of identities which meet, cohabit, inform, and alter each other. We become less ourselves, and more the company we keep.

This leads way to a rekindling of Hegelian roles and relationships–namely, the idea of the master/slave relation. In Hegel's dialectic the thesis and antithesis battle and combine to create a synthesis. In relationships, this dialectic is that of the master and slave. When two personalities meet they battle to define whom is the master and whom is the slave. Once roles are defined they create a synthesis. A combining of the two personalities, this is their relationship, however the master remains dominate. Think of it as the two combine to create a factory, however while they work together to one end, one remains the boss and the other the worker. The master, the greater consciousness, defines the narrative of the relationship.

Narratives are what become of importance here. In an age of subsuming selves, and malleable and influenceable identities, what happens to the individual's agency. In the anime *Ghost In The Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (specifically "*2nd Gig*") this idea of identity becomes central, even in the title of the show "Stand Alone Complex." In the show

"the Net" (internet) combines all people, linked via e-brains. It creates a heightened idea of the collective and society and ones place within it. Few people achieve complete individuality, these are like Hegel's masters, the superior consciousness that define their own narratives. The case of this is called a Stand Alone Complex. These people have an unprecedented power over others through the Net. In accordance to Hegel's dialectic they stand above the mass majority defining narratives for them, and lending themselves out to others who become copy cats of them.

In both season the main antagonist is one of these Stand Alone Complexes. In the second season of the show "2nd Gig" a character named Gouda becomes increasingly aware of his ability and aims to use his influence to define complex meta-narratives that change and control government and military actions. The show boils down to a conflict between Gouda and a mysterious character Kuze, another person seemingly with a Stand Alone Complex. As Gouda's plans involving Kuze come to conclusion the argument stands, who's the master and who is the slave? Is Kuze acting as part of Gouda's narrative, or does Gouda simply believe he is an individual acting as a copy cat of Kuze? Whose narrative is being followed?

As we take to the internet in the real world we see the emptying and self and identity. The question must then be asked on the personal and meta-level, whose narrative are we following?

Perhaps Jonah Peretti hasn't realized the full implications of his own text and work. Perhaps he truly was just won over by the money and lost conviction in his stance against the subsuming powers of capitalism. What Buzzfeed, it's founding text, and its therefore successful application prove is the power not only people have over our identities but how the vessels of communication and consumption of information can influence this process. In the case of *Buzzfeed*, the master is not a person, nor a greater consciousness, but system designed to remove us of our individuality and identity. In this, our agency is not altered or informed by another consciousness but our agency is dissipated by a system which in place establishes its own.

It is easy to say this phenomena is not new, but in fact something capital and nations have always strived for. The idea of patriotism and nationalism as a government instilling its own agency over people. Still this is different, not saying representative democracy works or is fair, but still the act of a government still reflects the citizen. It is a more traditional master/slave relationship, but an admitted and accepted one. The act of a corporation doing so is worrisome and more invasive. A corporation owes no explanation or statement of ideology. We become not even consciously aware of what narrative we are following, or whose narrative it is. Or maybe worst off, there is no ideology replaced, no narrative embedded in the systems. Perhaps these systems exist only to empty us of our own. Through these systems our identities are taken and our agency is lost. As *Buzzfeed* only reposes a pseudo-identity through its propagation, there is no identifiable individuals in its world. As *Ghost In The Shell* puts it, these are people with no ghost (soul/self) and they are most vulnerable for interception and influence, for someone with a Stand Alone Complex to take over. We hear a lot about turn-key fascism when it comes to the surveyed state, this is a form of such on another new level, an introspective level, where it is unnoticed as we feel the actions are our own. A society of people with, as design duo M/M Paris put it on their well known poster, "No Ghost, Just A Shell."

"I would never want to belong to a club that would have someone like me as a member." I reject my acceptance out of some deep seeded inadequacy. I accept people's anger and fury towards me, I internalize it. It becomes me, it is becoming of me. I say too little when people linger for dialogue, I speak too much when the moment of their attention is gone. When destruction is rationalized, when it is slow, when it is an accepted violence against self. When the disease is more than the person. When the self is parsed, not heart vs. mind, but two complete circuits within one container. I am not a person, I am interference. I am

entropic static that is nothing but an image of it's own entropy. Light that peaks through in strong rays to illuminate the dust hung in midair, a hologram of no image but light itself. A consciousness of something being, but not form, simply the elements that in some other world, some other time, could be something. I never slowed down. No anchor weighed onto me so no mass formed. I am not a collective, I am extreme individuation moving as if together but as sparse as the stars. I only ever inhabit other forms, I am at times you, at times her, at times a building, at times water. I am as much the objects in this space as I am the people. I am unseen except as a reflection of another to themselves, the light that radiates off them creating their image in equally disparate threads. A refraction. A tool for one to contemplate and become a better self, before I dissipate back into the entropic static. The person is a methodology. We are each lone examples of a possible outcome of the first act. We seldom step in tune but when we do it's a beautiful choreography. These moments of phase are perhaps everything, to for once move entropically with someone. Two parts that become more visible through joint density, the closest to a thing to it's own object. I want your entropy, I want to align to something, I want to be a more violent static. Perhaps I want it all. I will continue to dance, upon the aggressive lack. In defiance of eminence, upon the dead stars and fog, upon the dust. I will continue to drift, as stars do, in opposite directions, at an accelerated pace until my entropy has rendered me invisible. Then I will not be anything, but I will be everywhere, I will cover all and join, in minuscule bits, the fabric of everything. I want to go faster.

CHAPTERS

I.

MODERN NOSTALGIC FANTASIES

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.
— Walter Benjamin, about *Angelus Novus* (1920) by Paul Klee

October 4th, 1957, Elementary Satellite 1, better known as *Sputnik*, broke through the barrier of our atmosphere to become the first object to originate from Earth and enter Space. The journey of Sputnik signified the end of one history of progress and the creation of a whole new one—Sputnik was a catalyst that introduced modernity to the world. I am speaking less of the means of modernity in this, than I am speaking of the space in which modernity is concerned—that, as an endlessly utopian project, is the future. Marked by its relentless order, modernity is the aim to draw rational responses to the zeitgeist and extrapolate them into a vision of the future, so we can, in present, begin to develop infrastructure to shape the future of civilization on this planet into a rational utopia. To think about the future is to be modern.

The Soviet Union was a massively modernist experiment that took over trying to structure a union of countries under a strictly rational system, that of communism. While the Soviet Union struggled to continue on, politically and economically, they managed to put together a space program and became the first nation to enter space. This was possible because the core of the Soviet project was an immense importance placed on the shaping of the future. From after, the Tsar was the image of the new Russia and with this the modern Soviet man. The Soviet Union believed that the joint project of technological advancement and exploration would become the economic and spiritual backbone that kept the union together and ahead of the rest of the world—especially ahead of the United States whom the Soviets where in a cold war with accelerating technological threats and shows of power. The future was the endgame for the new Russia.

So, the Soviet Union put Sputnik into space, showing the world they were literally and figuratively on a technological and raw powerful level above the rest of the world—though *Sputnik* means "fellow traveler", it was a body of a ballistic missile, a tool of war. It was the punctum, the apex, of the Soviet Union's futurist, modernist ideal.

By being the first to enter a new unexplored terrain, the Soviet said to the world the future belonged to them. It was off this fear of losing the future to Russia, that the United States founded their own space program, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), on July 29th, 1958, nearly 11 months after Sputnik had made it to space. With NASA, the United States revitalized their modernist project that once kickstarted the American economy before the World Wars with the Industrial Age and Fordist manufacturing and economics. Thusly, the Soviet Union spread modernity back into the United States, sparking what would be considered Late Modernity. Over the next few decades the Soviet Union and the United States raced their advancing space programs aiming to be the first to put man on the moon. This space race had many implications for the nations as world superpowers, enemies, and the eventual outcome of the Cold War. However, there was a side effect of this race, the massively accelerated invention of new technologies. This acceleration drove the American economy for those decades as subsequent technologies and advancements came from the research and work being done at NASA. NASA put together a sub-part of their association called the *Technology Transfer Program* to showcase and explore practical applications of the strides being made when aiming for the moon. New inventions were catalogued in an annual report called NASA *Spinoffs* and introduced; freeze-dried food, infrared thermometers, heart monitors, LED lights, artificial limbs, and much more. These technologies fed into the American dream of the future, from this rapid growth in technology artists, designers, manufactures, all started to imagine an American future. DisneyWorld built the "World of the Future" amusement park, designers like Ray and Charles Eames showcased America's technological utopianism at the World's Fair, manufacturers pushed ideas of the homes, the food, the car of the future. Dreaming about the future became the galvanizing force of the whole American economy—America became modern.

July 20th, 1969, just shy of 11 years after the founding of NASA, the space mission Apollo 11 brings the first men to the moon. America's race with the Soviets was over, the new frontier was won by the United States. The modernism passed on by the Soviet Union found a better system for itself and flourished past the Soviet communist ideal. Forward-thinking became the mantra of the "American way", which pushed their industries and economy into unprecedented production and wealth, spurred by an unbound hubris that America could achieve anything. Through new technological breakthroughs and abundance new products would fuel American commerce while industry used the latest manufacturing technologies, or took advantage of a new age of globalization, to maximize their returns. Here began that period of Late Modernism, the utopian future thinking, joined with American style capitalism to thrive in the existence of emerging mega-corporations that saw themselves as the tools to create a new future.

As America continued in a Cold War with the Soviet Union and a hot war in Vietnam, the political left found this new American hubris to be a dangerous flag to fly. The American economy, driven by technological advancement and superiority, had led to the boom of a major thriving industry, the military-industrial complex. Corporations that lauded themselves as the builders of a better future worked with the American government and military, and their quick growth and globalization posed a threat of the exporting of American idealism and capitalism. In such, the left took opposition to this mantra of the American-way and therefore took up opposition to the future project of Modernism. As philosopher Simon Critchley put it, "we have to resist the idea and ideology of the future, which is always the ultimate trump card of capitalist ideas of progress." The future was modern, the future was therefore capitalist, and to build a world outside of capitalism the people had to stop thinking about the future and start dealing with the reality of the

present day. This thinking ushered in a movement of post-modernism, an ideology that aimed to reject the utopian promises of late modernism and remove the glossy veneer it had coated prevalent thinking with. Across America spread the notion that, in the mists of wars and a plateauing economy, spending federal money on missions to the moon was a frivolous vanity project, that was no longer needed as the United States had already claimed the moon and beaten the Soviet Union in the space race. Under growing pressure and economic difficulties, NASA's budget was cut drastically. The last manned mission to the moon took place in December 1972 and no person has gone to the moon since.

42   EXOPLANETARY STRUCTURES

With the end of the manned missions, NASA's missions switched from the near frontier of our own satellite to the exploration of deep space. The late '80s and '90s usher an age of probes, telescopes, and rovers, tools that no longer focused on the immediate but set out to explore the vastness of the universe. What led was the discovery of whole new worlds and planets outside of our solar system. From being taught in schools there are nine planets we have come to learn there are solely nine in our solar system, elsewhere, in hundreds of other solar systems exist thousands of other planets, some much like our Earth—these planets are given the name "exoplanets." As the changing thought and politics of the time seemed to push NASA aside in favour of focusing on our world, our countries, and local, tangible issues, NASA pushed back the other way, instead of looking at the local and at hand, to the very distant and unreachable. In 2004, NASA constructed the High Accuracy Radial Velocity Planet Searcher (HARPS) to search deep space for new Earth-like planets—it has discovered 130 planets, a small part of the over two thousand known exoplanets in our universe. With the discovery of whole other possible worlds, solar systems, and possibly lives, Earth becomes decentralized in our understanding of the Universe.

Modernism, which looked to a singular whole, and post-modernism, which looked to act upon the present, both were eclipsed by the decentralizing of Earth within the universe. The Earth now was neither a totality, just a singularity in a vast cosmos, a planet that seems as a small pale blue dot in the night sky of another planet. Semantically, the human race no longer were the sole authors of the cosmological reality, but perhaps just a subjectivity in relation to 2,000 other planet's realities. This model of thinking is shared, within the same vein, as the basis of an ideological, that is a predecessor to post-modernism, known as post-structuralism. Post-structuralism is an ideology that rejects singular narrative by rejecting the author as the sole authority or voice, it aims to seek out the peripheral to decentralize an idea from a singular subjectivity. The discovery of exoplanets does so on a, literally, universal scale—and such was the argument made by NASA. By exploring outwards, deep space, distant planets, dying stars, we could learn more about our own planet and existence than we could from an archeology of Earth.

Post-structuralism ushered in a model of thinking where subjectivity is everything, denying the notions of "objectivity" and "rationality" presented by modernism on the grounds that they were defined under a euro-centric, masculine, paradigm. Post-structuralism stands on two tendons, the first being Foucaultian anthropologies of all the standing structures we see governing in the world. The second, being more confusion, not listening to singular narratives or the belief in non-bias media, but an openness to varying voices and the proliferation of the minority's voice, in order to disrupt any attempt at the creation of hegemonic structures.

In the time of Late Modernism progress—societal and economic—was created through the aims of a singular goal. For everyone to work towards this goal they must understand each other as part of a whole, Modernism was a structure that was used to encapsulate nations and

move them towards this goal. However, with emergence of Post-Structuralist thinking, the ability to maintain a super-structure is becoming challenging. The structure of Late Modernism no longer fits the public as the minority has come to view themselves in the position of being parts within the structure but not of the structure, therefore they reject the goals of the structure. If the notions of progress and capitalism that Late Modernism proliferated and replicated, for its own expansion, were to continue, the fundamental structuring of those notions would have to adapt—and adapt it has.

Nearing the end of Late Modernism, before the Post-Modern moment, a collective of academics and theorists formed an inclusive society where they set themselves the goal of directing the global thinking to what they saw as a sustainable structure. The new structure would be open enough to allow multiple narratives and voices to exist in constant exchange, in fact it would be encouraged, so it could subsume political discourse within itself—for this the idea was named Neoliberalism. The specialty of Neoliberalism was a combining of Late Modernist notions of progress with Post-Modernism's desires for locality. In place, Neoliberalism would encourage minorities and local politics but would proliferate an ethos of collectivism through it. By acknowledging all this disparity we could celebrate diverse people coming together to achieve a singular goal.

NASA, in 1998, became part of such a project, that would bring numerous people and nations together. In fact, NASA would come to work with their competitor that caused their creation and spurred on a Cold War, the Russian Federal Space Agency (Roscosmos), and Japan whom the United States had attacked with atomic weapons fifty three years earlier. The project of the International Space Station brought together the United States (NASA), Russia (Roscosmos), Europe (The European Space Agency), and Japan (JAXA)—later on The Canadian Space Agency would join in the project as well. This *International Space Station* was a proving to the world, that regardless of history and politics, all kinds of people and nations could

come together and work towards a better future—a wonderful case-and-point proof for Neoliberalism.

Diversity, the political calling card of Neoliberalism, also functions as its economic model, the freedom of choice. Late Modernism gave the world large mega-corporations that worked within a Fordist model of capitalism. Companies like *IBM* and *Microsoft* dominated the emerging technological market and ruthlessly tried to shut down competitive companies in order to maintain a monopoly. Neoliberalism instead encourages diversity, no large monopolies, but endless small companies that could be hyper-specialized to make them act at a local and global scale. This is the market of Silicon Valley and start-up culture, a womb for technology companies to build up and die out at unprecedented rates.

Within this market the investment into a singular entity is not financially sound. Why make one company to try to do everything when you can have numerous companies hyper-specialize in different areas and then bring the pieces together? It is also a way of hedging your bets, why invest everything in one pot? Diversify. Long standing entities have fallen to this new logic, even NASA. NASA is no longer seen as the one entity for the hopes of space exploration, but in the mists of smaller budgets has had to diversify and export some of its functions to smaller new companies. NASA now offers contracts to competing small companies to take over functions that NASA used to do exclusively, let delivering payloads to the International Space Station. Notably, a large portion of NASA's contracts have gone to Silicon Valley company *SpaceX*, founded by the start-up veteran Elon Musk. NASA now functions as the overseer and manager of Space exploration, it is the neoliberal who brings together dispersed parts towards a singular goal.

Through the dispersed model of space exploration, NASA acts as the determinant, it defines the goal and brings various individually autonomous parts together to form

relationships that work to-wards that goal. What goal is that? As a product of and the engine of Late Modernism, NASA functions through ideas of exploration and frontierism. The aims of the International Space Station as a laboratory for scientific experimentation had failed to capture the imagination of the public who could not grasp the intangible new grounds that would be made. As a result, NASA struggled on with diminishing funding. However, the new model of the Neoliberal market and the new ability for NASA to start exporting larger tasks, allowed NASA to refocus and now pull in other entities to work together towards a new goal that would spur on the public to support progress. NASA was looking for a renaissance of the golden age of Space Exploration when they were racing to the moon. The best disciple trying to bring about this renaissance of NASA is Neil DeGrasse Tyson, who is known for his poetic and passionate speeches about why we need to economically support space exploration. Tyson appeals for support by evoking the technological and economic boom that accompanied the Apollo missions to the moon. To re-invigorate the space program he fantasizes manned missions to the next closest heavenly body, Mars. Mars is a tangible frontier, akin to the Moon, with new "firsts" to be made, something the public could understand and celebrate. Effectively Mars is to the current times, what the Moon was in the 1960s.

Thinking and fantasizing Mars has been around in science-fiction since the birth of the genre, but now the push to get the general public joining in has become stronger than ever. On August 6th, 2012 the Curiosity Rover successfully landed on Mars, two days later it began to send back our first images of the foreign landscape. Not since the moon had we seen another world the way we see our own. Mars was no longer something we saw through a telescope, as a dot in the sky, we did not see it as a massive distant whole, but we viewed it as we experience our own world, limited, with perspective, and a gaze that lead to a horizon line. We were no longer *looking at* Mars but through photographic transmutation able to experience it—images from Curiosity have now

been stitched together into 360 degrees images explorable through virtual reality to further push the feeling that we are in fact already on Mars. With the new images flooding in to NASA and being released to the public almost daily, Mars began to play a part in the cultural zeitgeist. Space exploration became not just resigned to the world of science-fiction, the obsessives, and the "nerds", but entered into a total cultural space. Neil DeGrasse Tyson revised the classic show *Cosmos* (2014), first recorded by astrophysicist Carl Sagan in 1980, blockbuster film maker Christopher Nolan creates his space epic *Interstellar* (2014), and science fiction legend Ridley Scott directs the heroic survivalist film *The Martian* (2015). Based on the novel of the same title by Andy Weir in 2014, The Martian is a tale of an astronaut stranded on the planet Mars after his team mistook him for dead and his struggle to survive on the foreign planet to make it back home to Earth. The film plays out the mythos of American determination and ingenuity that became the marker of the "American spirit" through the industrial and technological age. The can-do and ability to overcome any obstacles in the name of progress is the same mythos that drove the Cold War space race. The Martian presupposes that NASA, and therefore the United States, have already made it to Mars and began temporary colonies for exploring how one could sustainably live. When stranded alone against unimaginable odds, the hero, Mark Watney, learns how to tame and control the new world, a recurring theme in American history and mythos. At one point in the film, after having gotten potatoes to grow in Martian soil, Watney even claims that he has now officially colonized the planet. While set in a near future the film looks back to a nostalgic fantasizing of the American spirit, when America was great, innovative, and able to make new grounds through their dominance and greatness. Even more, under the guile of Neoliberal togetherness, the film imagines all the world coming together in support of the American heroic figure. As the ISS brought together old enemies to work towards one project, The Martian imagines a future were their current tentative relationship with China is overcome, in

the Chinese space program willingly offering up their aid, resources, and secrets to the Americans. At the climax of the film, shots are shown of people around the world watching out on the streets, from New York to London to China, anxiously to see if the American hero has in fact been able to overcome all odds and survive.

The film in itself appears as propaganda for a new space age—an age that is American. This space age is already subsumed by the same rhetoric and ideology of the first space age of the 1960s and the missions to the moon. Mars is already claimed and a part of the capitalist progressive framework of Late Modernism, now reborn through Neoliberalism. It is simply an updating of prior rhetoric which it is looking to re-institute, a modernization of past fantasies.

48   WHERE NO ONE HAS GONE BEFORE

What is there now for the left? For those who aim to step outside the ideological encapsulation of the capitalist progressive narrative? If Modernity means to be focused on the creation of the future, the future as laid out before us is already subsumed under its rhetoric. Neoliberalism, Modernism, and Capitalism have already exported themselves to become extra-planetary frameworks. What is the future if we keep playing out the same fantasies out of nostalgia? It is as Walter Benjamin describes the angel of time in Paul Klee's painting Angelus Novus, instead of a chain of new events we keep piling the same wreckage upon wreckage—our time is not linear but a circular loop transpositioning rhetoric and ideologues into the present and future. Perhaps what there is now is the attempt to step outside our natural history, out of our time and space, to worlds without a past and without nostalgia. The legendary and progressive science fiction writer Ursula K. LeGuin once called for science-fiction writers to pick up where theorists have failed and to start imagining the end of capitalism. In her novels, such as *The Left Hand of Darkness*, LeGuin defines new worlds with their own genders and non-genders and its own concept and working

of time. Perhaps, it is by these propositions we can begin to step outside of our world into new ones where we can think and posit outside the looping nature of our time. In these worlds we are free to define progress for ourselves, not left to the modernist-capitalist understanding which we keep falling back upon. Through these postulations we can begin to imagine new futures that differ and reject the ones we are presented with. Instead of Mars, which is a modern nostalgic fantasy, we should look to the exoplanets and embrace their multitude and the confusion and possibilities they bring. In these worlds, upon these distant heavenly bodies, we are the Ubik, outside of time, the creators of suns and worlds.

II.

BELIEFS AND REALITY

What does a scanner see? I mean, really see? Into the head? Down into the heart? Does a passive infrared scanner like they used to use or a cube-type holo-scanner like they use these days, the latest thing, see into me—into us —clearly or darkly? I hope it does, he thought, see clearly, because I can't any longer these days see into myself. I see only murk. Murk outside; murk inside. I hope, for everyone's sake, the scanners do better. Because if the scanner sees only darkly, the way I myself do, then we are cursed, cursed again and like we have been continually, and we'll wind up dead this way, knowing very little and getting that little fragment wrong too.
— Philip K. Dick, *A Scanner Darkly* (1977)

As it is with energy and thermodynamics, information can only be conserved and lost—no new information comes from nothing. So how is it that new theories and information come about? As Stanisław Lem outlines in his monolithic *Summa Technologia*, new information is formed through a process of induction. Induction looks internally to project externally, or to say, it looks at the past to predict the future. The example Lem uses to illustrate this is the process of behavioural conditioning, specifically that with dogs, he says, "a dog 'believes' that it will be fed after the bell has rung because it has always been like this up until now and conveys this 'faith' by salivating". Induction is a method of "belief" creation, understanding patterns and process to form a belief in what will follow action *x*.

Lem continues to say that a belief remains a mere act of faith until empirically proven correct. The belief and the investigation go hand in hand as the two fields of particle studies, the theoretical and the experimental do. In the documentary *Particle Fever* (2013) the relationship is described as symbiotic; "without the theorists the experimentalists do not know where to look, but with-out the experimentalists the theorists never know if they are right." Since no new information can form out of nowhere, we must first form a belief which is a metaphysical state of information that can then materialize into concrete empirical truth—"[e]very action starts from a position of knowledge that contains gaps," says Lem.

Lem argues that this process has been necessary for evolutionary progress and that evolution has favoured those "homeostats"—those beings capable of adaptation to their environment—who have been able to develop the concept of belief. However, if a belief is unable to be proven empirically, if it is never metabolized into truth (or effectively proven to be false) it remains a metaphysical state. If we have strong faith in a belief and it is repeatedly proven false this puts the believer and reality at odds. This is the risk of induction as the formulation of truth. Through induction multiple metaphysical states are can be formed from the same information. It is as writing

multiple different equations to express a singular phenomena, but if the phenomena proves to be untestable, all the equations or beliefs remain metaphysical states, all possible and equally true. All answers are fair if you cannot definitively solve for x.

This ability to create metaphysical states has been the privilege of those homeostats that have developed the ability to formulate beliefs—namely humans. With this ability we have evolved to develop all forms of science, knowledge, and therefore civilization and the modern world. As well we have created ideologies, methodologies for formulating beliefs, and as such have created an abundance of metaphysical states, religion, geopolitics, national, local, personal politics, etc. In this we have created a world where any phenomena can have many metaphysical states, x can spawn many possible answers, even ones that contradict themselves, that are all potentially valid.

The love child of cybernetic theory is the global information network that aims to connect the world in a nationless archive. In 1969, five years after Lem published *Summa Technologia*, an information sharing network called ARPNET, created by the American military research agency DARPA, connected the University of California, Los Angeles, with the Stanford Research Institute. ARPNET was a network for military researchers to connect with each other to better and more quickly share, respond, and ultimately develop new technologies. It was also the first network using computers to electronically send information, and this became the first network that led to the creation of the World Wide Web.

Also that year architect and cybernetic theorist R. Buckminster Fuller published his book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, a totalizing text that looked at nature, labour, and human interaction, and surmised that all could be understood as decentralized complex of networks that could be rationally and mathematically understood through the advent of automated machines. In *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, Fuller introduces his theories of synergetics, command automation, and general systems theory—maths which could be used to understand the

complex relations of living things. Fuller was influenced by and worked with Stuart Brand, whom a year before published his book, *The Whole Earth Catalog*, a journal dedicated to publishing new political and social theories suited for a view of the world as a singular whole. Fuller had written two articles for the book, including *God is a Verb*, which opened the book and was paired with Brand's text *WE ARE AS GODS*, which closed it. The World Wide Web—the internet—optimistically, is the ultimate tool of Fuller's and Brand's theories, a global information sharing system capable of documenting the world in an active archive.

The internet, through quantitative information gathering, becomes the new field of cybernetic inquiry. Being a digital archive, the physical, as recorded and accounted for on the internet, has already been transmuted into mathematical code which can be put through equations, such as interpolation and Fuller's synergetics models. These equations and models can be coded and automated to sift through and use the archives to a particular end: to solve for x, what ever the desired x is. By quantitatively running these equations, systems and patterns begin to form. These are the x that cybernetic theory is always looking for. Once an equation has been run through hundreds, thousands, and millions of times, more patterns appear, these patterns can then be relied on to represent a consistency that is finite. That is new knowledge gained. Returning to the induction theory of information, this new information can be used to predict or hypothesize future outcomes and possibilities. New mathematical models now become writable, ones that utilize this new information to create reliable automated processes—these new models are *algorithms*.

Algorithms are the viable endgame of cybernetic theory; models that can be used to not only understand all things but to project and predict anything as well—as long as a thing is translatable into data that can be mathematically understood, the future of that thing can be predicted. This is not a different or new process of knowledge creation—it is as induction says and knowledge creation has always been. But it is a further automation of the process, in which the ability to formulate beliefs has been codified—literally

written in code. That, which Lem argued was the exclusive ability of the homeostat, has been given to a new form of being. Through cybernetic processes the act of formulating beliefs, and therefore the ability to create new metaphysical states, has been automated—and as automation has sped up the rate we calculate, trade, hypothesize, exchange, share, it has sped up the rate we formulate new metaphysical states.

With the influx of new connected networks and unprecedented access to information comes the influx of the unanswerable. The *Dunning-Kruger* effect presents two cognitive states; one where the subject knows little about a field of inquiry but due to the ignorance of the larger scope of the field they feel as if they know a lot, and a second where the subject is more knowledgeable and though they may have more knowledge than the first subject since they are aware of the larger scope they feel as if they know a little. Socrates expressed this phenomena simply with his paradox, "I know that I know nothing". Both notions express the apparent fact that the more information we have access to and the more knowledge we possess, the less we feel we know. This can be attributed to the fact that there is no totalizing of scientific inquiry, there is no foreseeable end in which everything is known. Therefore, the more a subject learns about the known the more they are directed to those unknowns that continuously, and seemingly indefatigably, drive scientific inquiry. The more empirical information we consume the more we are thrust into the metaphysical states of hypothesis and belief. Getting away from the scientific, another reasoning could be that with increased access to information from around the world from multiple sources, we begin to understand that some fields of inquiry are purely subjective and cannot be understood empirically. This leaves us in a cognitive jungle of metaphysical states, in which there is no discernible or "correct" way through.

These subjective fields are those which seemingly cannot be, or possibly just have not yet been, quantified and algorithmically understood; those of emotional relations, ethics, and politics. These fields of inquiry persist as series of metaphysical states where the paradoxical can be true.

To take a recent example, the Euro crisis and Greek depression can be viewed as a complex series of metaphysical states that contradict themselves but all, objectively, are equally true. With the on-going crisis in Greece, Germany had been sending financial support to keep the Greek banks afloat, however, they imposed strict terms of austerity over Greece if they were to continue receiving support. On July 5th, 2015 Greece went to the polls to vote on new measures proposed by Germany. To Germany, Greece had not implemented enough measures and had not carried out those they had strictly enough. The German government saw Greece as people taking their money to support an inviable way of life and had not shown effort to correct this behaviour. In response, Germany had proposed even more rigid and severe austerity measures for Greece if they wanted to continue receiving support from them. To the Greeks, they felt they had complied with all of Germany's measures to their own detriment. The Greeks saw Germany as over-reaching, trying to viably take over the Greek economy despite Greece's best efforts to install new measures to keep their economy afloat. Both of these views of the same scenario contradict each other but both are built upon the same empirically sound facts. The knowns were the previous measures proposed by Germany and the calculable and trackable implementing of those measures in Greece. Statistics were watched closely, how much money was coming into Greece, where was it going, how much Greek citizens were withdrawing from banks weekly, etc.. While all these things are knowable, they led to two opposing beliefs. Though there are empirical truths, they cannot reach into the subjective, which cybernetics cannot quantify. Fields such as the political, the humanistic, the emotional, interpersonal and geopolitical relations cannot be understood empirically. Once we try to take mathematical fact and extend it into formulating beliefs within subjective fields, all that is possible is the creation of metaphysical states. In its own right, the Greek crisis is its own jungle of the metaphysical with new states of being created by Greece, Germany, the IMF, the Eurozone, and post-political career of Yanis Varoufakis.

The internet, an active archive that aims to transmute all information—the love child of cybernetic theory. It is a tool that could be used to model and understand the world through unprecedented quantifiability, that could write equations to understand all things that exist. However, as the internet moves into a platform and tool of sociability, that through giving all within the network unprecedented access to information, has moved away from empirical completeness into the metaphysical. As the known pushes scientific inquiry further into the unknown, the influx of information on the internet pushes us to that which cybernetics has not yet quantified; politics, ethics, and human relation and emotion. As such, the internet becomes less a place of empirical truth, and fails to reflect back onto the real, making it understandable, but pushes the world into a place past the real and the simulation, into the purely metaphysical—in which all tools of navigating the jungle are made from the jungle, all equal, with no divisible truth or discernible way out.
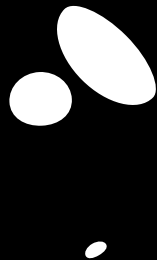
In this city, everyone is like a God. You don't have to move an inch to see images far removed, or to touch things that aren't there and access other realities that are there. It's just that these Gods don't do anything. If the Gods won't do it then the people will. Sooner or later, we'll find out.
— *Patlabor 2: The Movie* (1993) written by Kazunori Ito, directed by Mamuro Oshii

In response to Varoufakis reveals cloak and dagger 'Plan B' for Greece… *written by Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, for the Telegraph UK* (26 Jul 2015)

On July 5th, 2015, the nation of Greece held a vote on new austerity measures proposed by Germany and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to fight their on-going financial crisis. In that vote, Greece shocked the European Union with a "no" vote on the measures, leading to the possibility of Greece leaving the European Union and the Euro currency project. The next day the unapologetic leftist and enigmatic finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, resigned from his position. Varoufakis had fought against the austerity measures since his election and with the win of the no-vote he had seemed to be leading Greece in the direction he hoped for it, with this, his resignation was a surprise to the world. While the news speculated on what his exit meant for Greece, the no-vote, Greece's relations with the EU and as to why exactly he chose that time to step down. On July 26, some answers came from Varoufakis himself in a report by the *Telegraph UK*. In the article Varoufakis admits to of having a plan for Greece that seemed more out of a science-fiction thriller than real geopolitical relations. Varoufakis admitted to of having a "Plan B" for Greece which was to suddenly pull out of the Euro project and switch the whole Greek banking system, including its debt, over to Drachmas. To achieve this he had hired a close team of five people which in secret hacked the IMF and Greek banks to obtain control over all bank records and financial information relating to Greece. The claim was, at the turn of a switch, Greece could have left the Euro and taken financial independence by switching to the Drachma without the IMF and EU having any prior warning. It was on the event of the no-vote that Varoufakis hoped to put his plan into action, but when denied the green light to go ahead by Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, he decided he had to resign. Varoufakis' account is a thrilling story of secrets, hackers,

and elite teams, of the small bullied protagonist standing up and winning out against the overarching oppressor, it is the stuff of movies—movies being creative re-tellings and reworkings of current realities and ideologies, they are the fantastic, yes, but inescapably representative. Is Varoufakis' story reality? It has not been confirmed nor denied, it exists as Schrödinger's cat, being and not being. Or furthermore, it is in a state of quantum uncertainty—perhaps all realities are. As Adam Curtis' *Bitter Lake* explores, sometimes our binary narratives of good/evil, friend/enemy, truth/lies are not so clear or, more so, completely inadequate to understand the complexity of the world. With increasing connectivity and access to information the world becomes less linear, narratives are not single streams but branch off in endless fractals. In this, any statement or claim to truth exists as a quantum un-certainty, it is at once truth and not truth, there is no valid way of being absolute either. Narrative, truth, reality, is then determined by simply which fractal branch we follow, which filter bubbles we inhabit, and which media we choose to ingest. It is simply the way we look which will determine reality.

Adam Curtis, Bitter Lake (2015) *in comparison to Gen Urobuchi,* Psycho-Pass Movie (2015).

I have recently watched two films which seem to have a conversation with each other while being very different films. The first film is *Bitter Lake* by British documentary maker Adam Curtis. The second is the continuation of the anime series *Psycho-Pass* into a feature film of the same name. While the former film is a historical documentary and the latter a futuristic science-fiction they both address a similar topic and the way events play out in both films are rather parallel. Both films address geopolitics in the Middle East and when a more advanced military power (in these films, the United States, England, and Japan) inter-cedes in local politics and engagements in Middle Eastern

countries such as India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. As well, both films inhabit a world of complex organizations and political relations in which ideas of good/evil, enemy/friend, and justice/abuse of power are not clear dichotomies and the failure to see such fuzziness complicates them further. In *Psycho-Pass*, the film builds upon the use of a governing entity known as the *Sybil System* which is an advanced AI created through hived minds to judge the criminality and future criminality of people. The past series of *Psycho-Pass* establish this framework and each of the two series pose a scenario and then sees how it plays out under this system. The first series asks, what if there was someone who the system could not judge, despite his actions the system could not judge him a criminal. The second series asks, what if people had the ability to, through medication and treatment, control the systems reading of them, practically it played out as, what if by simply taking a pill after a criminal act I could keep the system from judging me a criminal. These series explore the ideas of malleable morality, collective morality/judgment, societal conditioning, totalitarian authority, and abuses of power. The movie which takes place after these two series questions, what if the *Sibyl System*, which maintains control and order in Japan, was imposed on places in the mists of internal conflict and civil war to try to install order and peace. In such, Adam Curtis' *Bitter Lake* is a historical account of what happens when a power like that is introduced into places of civil unrest. Instead of the *Sibyl System*, the order and power is that perceived and propagated by the United States and England, their western ideologies and their belief in their divine correctness. In both cases, these systems of order are installed through military power, which complicates their use as it is not democratic or open, the ideology is not tested or proven right, it does not have to be, it has brute force behind it. In *Psycho-Pass*, the thesis arises when it is discovered that the people Japan is fight alongside and helping to install the *Sibyl System* are in fact the true violent militant rebels and the people they are fighting against are the democratic usurped resistance to them.

The militants had come to power in a violent coupe, then invited Japan to help install order, through this Japan gave the murderous militants the tools to take totalitarian control and the ability to criminalize anyone who stands against them. Those Japan believed to be good turned out to be those they thought they were ridding the country of. This mirrors perfectly a scenario that played out in Afghanistan as shown in *Bitter Lake*, where American soldiers came to the country to help the police hunt down violent extremists. However, it turned out that the police were the extremists who took control of the government through a violent coupe and that they were using the Americans and their advanced military to hunt down those who opposed them. While one film is science-fiction and the other a recount of real events, it is actually the real events that take this idea further to more ideologically disastrous ends. In reality, the situation in Afghanistan got further complicated, and the lines of good/bad, friend/enemy, got even further deteriorated as other countries got involved. As America went to fight extremists in Afghanistan their ally Saudi Arabia sent help in the form of sending their extremists to fight along them, in turn removing them from their country. America then fought one extremist group alongside another even more radical one. Once America had removed the first extremist group they left the country, this left an opening for the extremist group they were fighting alongside to take control of the position the first group occupied. That group turned into the radical Islamist group known as Al-Qaeda, which then carried out acts of terrorism against the United States, their once ally turned into their biggest enemy. Both films exemplify the complexities of geopolitics that counter the developed world's binary narratives of nationalism and good versus evil. They illustrate the growing complexity and uncertainty of a newly connected world in which reality seems nothing more than propagated virtualities.

The essay *On The Superiority Of The Analog* by Brian Massumi, starts with a poetic explanation of the virtual as something that is and is not. That cannot be sensed, but whose impacts are felt. This elusive definition matches the fleeting feeling of the virtual.

The virtual, as Massumi puts it, is movement—it is the deforming and changing of an image in transit. I believe it was Guattari who gives us a physical way to understand this when he describes liminal space. Imagine empty space as a solid block, but one you can push through. As you travel through the block, you leave a trail of your movements. At any point along the trace you make, you can cut the block and from the front see the image of yourself at that time, but together the block is a non representative path—a blur of movement. This makes me think of the cubist and futurist artists who were often trying to capture movement in their work, such as Brancusi's sculpture *Bird In Space*. However, Massumi would say cutting the block and looking at the figure in that time, is not a look at the virtual, but is merely

simulacra you are looking at—a representation of the virtual. In this, the virtual cannot actually be seen, visualized, nor frozen in process; the virtual is not what is being moved, but the movement itself. Much like when working with quantum particles, while these particles can be several things at once (in quantum computing both a 1 and a 0), the act of observing the particle solidifies it as one particle aspect of it (it is both a 1 and a 0, but when observed, it can only be a 1 or a 0, thus making it no longer quantum). In this way, quantum particles relate to Massumi's topology: having no predictive value, since it cannot be measured, quantified, or observed. Massumi gives us a practical way in which the virtual exists—one that can be seen as a rewritten equation. As the transition, the process from ascii code to text is not the virtual, it can be tracked, scripted, and understood; the process, however, from reading the text to thought to speech is a movement that can be understood as virtual. This mirrors, or is just a replacement of terms, from when we previously discussed spoken communication as its own semiotic process from what is heard (signifier), how our mind processes

it (signified), and how we respond/what we communicate back (interpretant).

Through attention, familiarity, or a scrutinous gaze, objects change the longer we spend looking at them. The act of looking becomes fundamental to the object's being, as the surface becomes glossed up in the blur of our stare. The object (the sign) becomes less evident and less visible as its signified becomes more obvious. We fill the empty void of the liminal space with new connotations. The object is alive—constantly changing meaning, and giving rise to meta-signs and new interpretations. We can view the object as constantly in motion like the molecule; we can view its relations between connotations and denotations as the x and p of Heisenberg's *Uncertainty Principle*.

They say a work of art is only alive in the studio, where it is still subject to change and the artist's tools. Once in the gallery, once presented and confirmed as a work of art by the gallery goer's gaze, the work becomes a static image. Images are however, not static.

As Barthes declared, the author is dead—meaning and message is up to the interpreter, the viewer of the image. Through time, dissonance from when and where the work was made, through its reproduction, through differential medias, interpreter's connection and tools for decoding, the work will vary—giving rise to multiple interpretations. The work is alive indeed; it moves forward through time, pushing through the liminal space. It can be dissected and studied through its meaning at a certain point in time, but this is simulacra—what the image was and no longer what it is. An act of looking at the image, at the present, changes its meaning and being—looking back historically at the image solidifies its being at a specific point in time.

The more we scrutinize and study the image, the less universal it becomes. To understand the image in a certain historical framework, we lose sight of its current incarnation and its being in other historical frameworks. To study the image based solely on formal qualities: colour, light, media, we lose its social and historical meaning. We can never understand the image fully. As we take a closer look

at it, we close in our frame of reference—we subdivide our resolution, finding almost infinitely more aspects of the image to study and quantify. History and formal technique can be viewed as two plot points (our x and p within the Heisenberg Principle), making the full image elusive to use by keeping its denotations in flux—by constantly adding new connotations we draw from it.

These processes are not exclusive to the art-object, as many (nearly all things) could be described as an image. Take for example, the idea of yourself as an image. To over-simplify, you yourself represent many places, ideologies, histories. You can subdivide end-lessly giving rise to meta-signs after meta-signs. Your political views can be seen as a sign representing your upbringing and experiences that led you to them. Those then lead to the political views of your community, your community's views are a sign of its history and geological location. Communities lead to dissection of the city, state, nation, geo-political standing, etc. By constantly expand-ing or narrowing one's frame of reference, you, as a sign, become infinitely complex—never giving rise to a whole image of you.

In fact, there can never be a complete image
of you as you are constantly discovering
new meanings, absorbing new information,
and these change your identity, leading to
constantly new conclusions to be drawn about
who you are.
       The self, our identities, and the image
of the being are never static. We encompass
many meanings at once which defy absolute
statements. We can never fully image our-
selves or the world around us, we can only
ever get a quantum peek.

THE TECHNICAL IMAGE   67

The technical image
The extended image

Panoramic views through
extended peripherals.
Drawing and image greater than our vision.

Hold out your two thumbs side by side
Hold them
                    straight out
in front of you in
the centre of your vision

The space your thumbs are covering
is the only space where you see things in
full definition
   To see this space in full detail it
   would be akin to a 7mp-res image

The rest of your peripheral around that space
only takes 1mp-res
   Whole whole field of vision
   takes about 150mp

A long shot through time tracking the
overlapping of history. Seeing both ways in
the fourth dimension. Seeing sideways in the
fifth dimension a virtuality

Brancusi+Massumi

   We can only see the imprint of an
   object in motion all things are in
   motion according to
   thermodynamics which is why we
   can only sense the 4D in one
   direction entropy works one way

we are tracing the trail of an object in
motion

What it appears to be is that object at one
particular moment in time of an object in
constant
          flux

The extended image is an image that extends
past the capability of not only the human
eye but human entropy and thermodynam-
ics. We observe the infinitely small and the
infinitely large simultaneously. We observe
a linear narrative that exceeds our own that
began with the entropy of radioactive parti-
cles upon the empty 10th dimension to the
point where all the stars have receded from
our observable capability.

Markings ⬭, lines ⬲, the visualization of
data is drawn on top of the extended image
to try to delineate meaning from the quag-
mire of information it presents.

IV.

SHIFTERS

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming. Meaning is produced not only by the relationship between the signifier and the signified but also, crucially, by the position of the signifiers in relation to other signifiers.
— Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1973)

With the advent of Web 2.0, user created content websites, came the creation of the blog. The term was first coined in 1997 by Peter Merholz as a shortened version of Weblog.[1] That distinction alone is worth noting: the idea of keeping a log is for archival purposes, a weblog is simply one that is recorded on the world wide web. The move to shortening the title goes along with the transition from being archival, or a monologue, to the blog becoming a platform for conversation, a dialogue. With the creation of LiveJournal[2], the blog went from a static publishing format to a crossbreed of a publishing platform and a forum. The process of sharing thoughts and opinions online was becoming increasingly conversational, giving way to a new form of online communication, the micro-blog. Micro-blogs "allow users to exchange small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links."[3] Possibly the most popular micro-blogging site is Twitter, which limits all content posts to a maximum of 140 characters. In regards to a history of publishing, if the book is a long form and the article a short form, then this new way of communicating could be called the micro-form.

Within the economy of micro-form, communication becomes increasingly abstract as it depends on utilizing common signs and signifiers to create a depth of understanding that is otherwise created through an expansive language. Out of this comes a form of communication that attempts to create its own channels through its reproductive value and mass proliferation. I will refer to the marriage of these two features as "shareability", a quality of being "quotable", with being open ended enough to be relatable to a large audience, or being "self-contained" in which the context is embedded in its message. These features are valued within the micro-form economy as it can be restated on many platforms—the shareable is an oasis/pavilion within changing landscapes; it does not rely on the contextualization of its surrounding, but contextualizes itself within its own existence. The most successful

of these shareable bits of language rise to the level of the meme. The word "meme", as defined by its originator Richard Dawkins, refers to an element of culture or system of behaviour that can be understood as non-genetically passing on from one individual to another.[4] In 2013, a secondary definition of meme was added to the dictionary: a meme could refer to a humorous image, video, text, etc. that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users.[5] While the new definition describes the properties in a tactical way, it is dependent on defining a meme through its speed of adaptation. While this is common within a meme, it ignores the linguistic behaviour of an meme that acts as a self-replicating entity.

There is an annual art and design contest titled *Memefest* – the aim of the contest is to push young artists and designers to explore ways of germinating ideas, having them disseminate in ways that are meme-like. For this end, they define a meme as a, "contagious idea that replicates like a virus, passed on from mind to mind. Memes function the same way genes and viruses do, propagating through communication networks and face-to-face contact between people."[6] The definition given by *Memefest* builds on top of the original one given by Dawkins; it goes further to state the act of passing on and adds the idea of self-replication. For this to happen a meme must then be self-contained, that is to say, it must contain both its image and meaning, its sign and interpretant, its code and the means of decoding it, as to not be dependent on contextual surroundings for its message to be understood.

72   JAKOBSON'S CATEGORIES

Linguistically, a meme could be understood through the work of Roman Jakobson who addresses the duplexity of language through the ideas of Message (M) and Code (C). Jakobson's essay *Shifters and Verbal Categories* explores the ways language folds over on itself, how its referentiality works, and how symbols become embedded in language. A shifter is a linguistic code that combines a concrete symbol with its existential relation to an object. These

are classified as *Indexical Symbols*.[7] Such shifters would be personal pronouns which combine the indexical symbol of "I" with the existential relation of the speaker. While "I" concretely represents a relation between the word and its speaker, its meaning is existential as its meaning changes and is tied to whom says it. Jakobson quotes linguist Kenneth Burkes saying, "Don't dare call yourself I. Only I am I, and you are only you."[8] These types of indexes become increasingly hard to use with in the micro-form, and if not all but impossible within the meme. A meme cannot rely on indexical symbols as they move and anthropomorphize through different cultures, languages, and contexts. They must then rely only on themselves, transporting all necessary information to understand the meaning within itself, or in an assumption of common knowledge. Under Jakobson, indexical symbols would be understood as C/M, where code can only be understood in relation to the message, which serves an index for references—such as who is the speaker.[9]

Another model of a duplex language is M/M or *Reported Speech*. These are utterances or communications that refer to another utterance, as another linguist Valentin Voloshinov states, "Reported speech is speech within speech, a message within a message and at the same time it is also speech about speech, a message about a message."[10] As memes move through contexts their meaning is displaced by its changing contexts, reported speech is an utterance that already displaces or relays speech. It is the act of quotation, in which one utterance becomes buried in another. Quoting an utterance, is taking it out of its original context and relaying or displacing it within your new context. In this way memes act as reported speech as they quote themselves. To understand a meme one must understand its prior and other uses as to decipher what it is saying, its statement, from that every meme is read as quoting that statement. Jakobson, to show reported speech, uses the example, "Ye have heard that it hath been said… But I say unto you…", a meme could be read as saying, "I have said this… But also this…"[11] Each new instance of the meme, each new use of it, quotes the prior and then adds to it. Through this the meme's proliferation contributes to creating its meaning.

As Memefest puts it, it is as a virus, the more there is of it, the more it reproduces, the more understanding we have of it. Its statement and meaning germinates through our cultures and differing contexts to establish itself as something that references itself, giving it an autonomous space in our understanding.

Jakobson attempts to further break these relations down into relations of two verbal categories, the first being either speech itself (^{s}) or the topic/narrated matter of the speech (^{n}), and the second the speech event itself (E) or those participating in the speech event (P).[12] Through the various combinations of these two categories we are given a model in which all communication can be understood. Under this model, a narrated event, a direct restating of an event in spoken language, would be represented as E^n and someone who was a participant of that event would be represented as P^n.[13] As discussed earlier, memes do not use indexical symbols to speak but speak in references. Thus, when categorizing memes under Jakobson's categories, we would speak of them as E^nE^n, a narrated event in relation to another narrated event, or P^nE^n, a participant speaking about a narrated event. These two instances (E^nE^n and P^nE^n) are what are called "connectors."[14]

What memes do is create a pool of knowledge, that is a collection of common references, which can then be used by new memes. Memes then become "connectors" which multiply and extrapolate their utterance through tying it to other references already within this pool of common knowledge. They can speak removed from the event itself or participants themselves to give a commentary that is not tied to a specific context. By remaining removed they are able to move as if floating, autonomously through platforms.

The internet functions on these series of platforms. The internet is an open system that allows for almost endless outcomes of what can be created and said within it. With such openness nothing comes to fruition, a structure is

needed. Platforms act as this structure by limiting what the internet can do, thus giving a contrived and created start and end to speech in the internet. These platforms altogether form what is the infrastructure of the internet.

In her article *Ethnography of Infrastructure*, Susan Leigh Star defines infrastructure through a series of properties it possesses. These properties are *Embeddedness*, *Transparency*, *Reach or scope*, *Learned as part of membership*, *Links with conventions of practice*, *Embodiment of standards*, *Built on an installed base*, *Becomes visible upon breakdown*, and *Is fixed in modular increments*, not all at once or globally.[15] When speaking of the infrastructure of the internet, all these properties become highly prevalent in their own ways, in the context of the internet and memes the traits of *Embeddedness*, *Transparency*, *Links with conventions of practice*, and *Becomes visible upon breakdown* are especially important.

While it can be said the internet inherently exists, it is not viewable or useful until these constraints of platforms are created to utilize it. In this, platforms become as if synonymous with the internet. As I say platforms are structures and systems within the superstructure of the internet, one could counter that the internet is a perceived structure created through the linking of platforms, the argument becomes a variation of the chicken and egg argument. Platforms, then, are acceptably indistinguishable from the internet, they are so embedded within it that they can be perceived to create it. I argue this is the trait of *Embeddedness*, not that they are in fact the internet, simply because the internet can exist without a given platform, but a platform can not exist without the internet. In a similar way, they also become transparent. Platforms and their relation to the internet are unseen to the user. We can see how the internet is created and its hard infrastructure of cables, but the virtual infrastructure is invisible to us. As well, the structure of these platforms are transparent to the large majority of their users. Users understand how they input into the system but how the platform understands that information and the computational responses to it are understood by the select few who built the platform. However, while we cannot see or, perhaps, even understand how

these platforms work we are well aware of when it fails. When a platform fails to work as expected or as usual, it causes outcomes (glitches) that are seen and show the limits or an unveiled view of the platform. The infrastructure of the platformed internet possesses the traits of *Embeddedness*, *Transparency*, and *Becomes visible upon breakdown*.

This infrastructure also possesses, and problematically so, the trait that it *Links with conventions of practice*. While constructing a new infrastructure, such as the construction of the internet, there is a construction of conventions. Platforms are systems used to constrain language, it does so by establishing a methodology of language, its input, interpretation, and feedback. Within a system of open language, the methodology a platform uses creates its success or value—this is seen in the valuing and copyrighting of algorithms. The more successful and ubiquitous a platform becomes the more new platforms aim to emulate them, at that point the methodology of these platforms become convention. Through their emulation and reproduction they define a conventional foreshortening of language which becomes the embedded and transparent within the infrastructure of the internet. The trait of *Linking with conventions of practice* leads to a hegemony which can become problematic. While the internet is an open system for all languages, these conventions limit and define a hegemonic structure for language which then excludes alternate forms of it. The infrastructure of the internet must then be examined by examining those who created these platforms. We can scrutinize the use of the internet, its hegemonic powers, its political and social powers by scrutinizing the values, principles, and politics of creators. When language is knowingly being foreshortened what is left out becomes as important as what is said. As Star presents at the start of her article, we must examine, "what values and ethical principles [we] inscribe in the inner depths of the built information environment."[16]

The treatment of language on the internet and the structures it builds are paradoxical. While without the constraint of platforms no communication is possible, the platforms then become, perhaps, over-bearing in creating a hegemonic system for language to exist. This means the internet fails to live up to its promise of open communication and dialogue as its openness becomes determined by the creators of platforms. The micro-form is a tactical reduction of language by these platforms. Some language is however able to pass from one platform to another, however this can result in either of two results; either they add to the growth and spread of the original platform's hegemony, or they exceed any one platform's constraints, if even slightly, superseding the hegemony.

Shareable language falls more into the former category. The micro-form economy reduces language to small bits of speech which play within the conventions of micro-form platforms. The micro-form is a language of its own and several platforms speak it. This language is minimal, quick, values brevity, and buries the extended. Its proliferation across multiple platforms does not challenge or exceed the conventions of the micro-form but strengthens its basis— through its proliferation and success it defines a convention which is adapted and used by new platforms growing and strengthening the micro-form economy.

So how does language and speech come to exceed these boundaries and challenge or expose the hegemony of these platforms? First, the way we look at these platforms and how they treat language must be reduced down to the basis of all language. What these platforms do is take a linguistic input and package, channel and interpret it to convey a desired outcome. They are simply code, institution, infrastructure, and channel, which ever way you choose to look at it, through which a sign and message travel to reach an interpreter, addressee and referent. By viewing platforms as simple sign-object or speaker-addressee relations we can then explore a history of language that interrupts these relations.

Philosopher Michel Serres speaks of interrupting these relations in his text *The Parasite*. Serres speaks of the parasite as something, an entity, that interrupts these relations to lead to alternate interpretations or understandings. Poetically he describes the process of the parasite, "[g]iven a black thing, an obscure process, or a confused cloud of signals—what we shall soon call a problem. We intervene to illuminate it, define it, reduce it to something simple. Someone comes along in these parts, no gloves, no hat. He opens the black box, Pandora's box with all its gifts."[17] While infrastructure tries to clarify a direct path between sign-object or speaker-addressee, the parasite interrupts these paths to create complexity and alternate readings, as Serres says, "The strategies of intervention, the interruption of the process or of the thing, observation that seeks to clarify, photon bombardment, the inseparable association of the knowers and the known—all make complexity increase."[18]

While platforms seek to simplify and reduce language to fit within predetermined pathways, a parasite could be introduced to obscure these systems by adding complexity where they have aim to reduce it. Shareable language within the micro-form economy does not add complexity but adheres and adjusts to the conventions of reduction—a meme however interrupts the pathways. A meme seems to speak the language of the micro-form, being at times short, most often singular, most prevalent forms on internet memes manifest as images which are singular and easily shared on multiple platforms. In this way memes can exist within a micro-form economy, however they are multi-layered, as discussed they become connectors that extrapolate themselves while remaining self-contained. Since they do not depend on the context of the platform, they can float between them. They move into a chosen platform and begin to extrapolate and multiple adding increasing complexity to these systems of reductiveness, they are, in Serre's terms, parasitic. It is through this feature and speciality of memes that they become useful for exposing the infrastructure of the internet. As a computer is a language oriented machine it can only read the language it is

programmed with, all other languages break the system down. The micro-economy is a language of its own, memes interrupt this language by adding a more complex language which breaks it down, as Star puts it as another trait of infrastructure, the conventions of platforms, which are invisible, become visible upon breakdown.[19] It is as inputting the number 2 into a binary series that only understands 1s and 0s. Memes then become a linguistic tool that can supersede the hegemony of the platform-oriented internet, giving rise to an openness of language that the platforms do not offer.

AUTONOMY

As we move forward into an increasing ubiquity of the internet, the language we use and the tools of language available to us change in order to fit the conventions of the internet. These conventions are embedded in the systems and platforms we use; they are invisible to all but the select few who create them. The openness of dialogue and speech the internet offers then is in constant reform by those creating new platforms to reduce language. How they reduce language, their conventions, and their internal infrastructures begin to play a major role in the world. While deeply embedded and nearly transparent, memes provide a tool to which escape, even if momentarily, as even memes can be subsumed by infrastructure with time, the hegemony being created by their platforms. It is through their slippery use of signs and references that they pass through these platforms autonomously with their own language. It is through their distant stance as a commentary on a commentary (connectors) that they add increasing complexity to these systems of reductiveness. It is through their autonomy that they become self-replicating entities that add exponential complexity to the point of exposing infrastructure. Memes are oddities of language online that become tools for reinstalling an openness of language to the internet through systems that aim to reduce it.

"Chase the parasite—he comes galloping back, accompanied, just like the demons of an exorcism, with a thousand like him, but more ferocious, hungrier, and all bellowing, roaring, clamoring."[20]

ENDNOTES

1   "It's the links, stupid". *The Economist*. 20 Apr. 2006. Retrieved 28 Nov. 2014.

2   Star, Susan Leigh. "The Ethnography of Infrastructure." *American Behavioural Scientist* 43.3 (1999): 381–382. Print.

3   "It's the links, stupid". *The Economist*. 20 Apr. 2006. Retrieved 28 Nov. 2014.

4   Metahaven. "Memes." *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments*? Moscow: Strelka, 2013. 31. Print.

5   "Meme" Def 1.1. *Oxford Dictionaries*, Oxford Dictionaries. Web. 28 Nov 2014.

6   "ABOUT MEMEFEST." *Memefest*. Web. 28 Nov. 2014. http://www.memefest.org/en/about/meme_defined

7   Jakobson, Roman. "Shifters and Verbal Categories." *On Language*. Ed. Linda R. Waughand Monique Monville-Burston. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990. 388.

8   Ibid. 389.

9   Ibid. 388.

10 Ibid. 387.

11 Ibid. 387.

12 Ibid. 390.

13 Ibid. 390.

14 Jakobson, Roman. 390.

15 Star, Susan Leigh. "The Ethnography of Infrastructure." *American Behavioural Scientist* 43.3 (1999): 381–382. Print.

16 Star, Susan Leigh. 379.

17 Serres, Michel, and Lawrence R. Schehr. "Diminishing Returns—The Obscure and the Confused." *The Parasite*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2007. 17. Print.

18 Serres, Michel, and Lawrence R. Schehr. 18.

19 Star, Susan Leigh. 382.

20 Serres, Michel, and Lawrence R. Schehr. 18.

The parasite interrupts a sign-object or a sign-interpreter relation, leading to adverse interpretations of the sign.

These relations between sign and object/interpreter travel through semiotic processes and can be viewed in several ways, among which are: channels, institutions, and infrastructures. These passageways share the common function of bridging a gap between the sign and its relation to the world. They cross over space, time, and people to create messages and information.

The virtual can be understood as the liminal space through which these passageways travel. At no point in the virtual is there a sign, object, or interpreter—it is simply a space that must be crossed in order for any discernible relationship to be formed.

To pragmatically explore this concept and frame it within a graphic design practice, we can investigate surfaces, edifices, and artifices that encompass this semiotic process; that is to say, we can explore media through the way we connect to it.

Our interaction to media is becoming increasingly secluded to that of the visual language. We now accept screens as an inescapable component in the architecture of the city and the social. With this comes a wealth of opportunities for the screen to interrupt and intervene in our routines and rituals, ultimately connecting with us in an intimate manner. These screens and new media become transformative elastic windows through which we observe the virtual, and situate ourselves on the end of new sign-object and sign-interpreter relations.

While screen-based media combines audible, written, and visual language, our primary engagement is that of the visual. The visual thus becomes our passageway and our channel of institution and of infrastructure. It becomes the foundation upon which our relation to a world of signs is built. The visual then becomes inherently a parasite, that interrupts (or intercedes, as the argument would be) this world of signs and ourselves.

This is not an idea completely foreign to design. In fact, I have heard it explored several ways, but most often in lofty artistic language adapted from Barthes and Benjamin. The

laissez-faire approach to language in such discourse causes the discussion to fall into a set of vague suppositions. It neither defines nor inspires the design practice and it disengages true critical introspection.

The assigned texts we were given prior to beginning studies at Yale fall under these categories. Michael Rock's *Fuck Content*, Beatrice Warde's *The Crystal Goblet*, Ellen Lupton's *Designer as Producer*, and Jean-Francois Lytard's *Paradox on the Graphic Artist* all explore this idea of the designer's role in the semiotic process, often restricted to the framework that graphic design is foremost a creative service. While a case can certainly be argued for this assumption, it forms a restrictive set of boundaries. Design under this framework is merely a tool optimized to uphold predetermined and preconceived relations to the benefit of the client. Exploration of the practice becomes limited to an exploration of refinement and a search for universal, reproducible modes of "effective" communication.

Lytard's Paradox of the Graphic Artist echoes the previous sentiments of *The Crystal Goblet* and *Fuck Content*—that design must be faithful to its subject. The paradox of the

graphic artist is how to create and have their own voice, yet while speaking other people's words. Design becomes a decorative vessel (goblet) for the subject and the message. The manner in which it is decorated (whether intricately complex or brutally simple) becomes the art of the graphic designer, as long as its main and inescapable purpose remains—that it must carry, transpose, and transport the subject and the message. It can be decorative, but it must still create these preconceived relations. *Fuck Content* attempts to take more autonomy for the designer, but seems disingenuous. The tone of Rock's writing also undermines any perception of sincerity. Rock never disconnects design from its pragmatic position of servitude; the text thus becomes self-contradictory. These texts have also become anachronistic, approaching design jobs as independent projects where creative control is assumed. This view is more suited to a discussion of a practice that remains squarely within the realm of print. To engage with the screen is to engage with the massive infrastructures on which the internet and the networked world are built. These infrastructures come with their own limitations and regula-

tions which limit the designer's ability to have total creative control. They are other languages that the designer must work with and within.

Design, more than ever, exists on multiple platforms: the screens, surfaces, and media of hegemonic infrastructures. To be faithful to the content or even the platform, institution or benefactor requires it to fall under the same hegemonic system. Design becomes a tool for the creation, structuring, and proliferation of hegemonic infrastructures and not that of its own accord, but that of the institutions that employ graphic design, and a step further in service of the infrastructures that dictate and control those institutions. If design (or the designer) aims to have an accord of its own, they must do what is believed that design cannot do—that is to be unfaithful to its subject.

These are my concerns when I invoke the parasite—can design take a sign-object, sign-interpreter relation and create unintended and adverse meaning? As I stated earlier, graphic design is already placed in a position where the parasite interrupts, but it often only intercedes, meaning that it becomes an invisible edifice the message travels through.

It aims to not obstruct or construe the message, but allow it to pass through with supreme clarity—often acting as a lens in which the meaning is concentrated in a manner that best directs and creates the desired interpretation and relation. What happens when design aims to not clarify, but obstruct and redirect? Can design directly affect the semiotic process in such a tactile way as to create new meanings and messages?

Perhaps instead of transforming meaning and message, design can best be applied in the apperception of a new experience, which often has the luxury of being part of its introduction in relation to things that exist on the screen. Design cannot change the sign, but it can change the interpretation of the sign and how we embed it in our pool of references.

Design then inhabits the virtual—not the sign, nor the object, nor interpretant, but the space which meaning and information travel through to reach its reading and interpretation. To illustrate, Massumi writes about the virtual, insistently, that it serves no predictive value and it is merely the space and record of meanings moving through it. A piece of wood floating in a lake has the entropic freedom to move

in any which direction. However, as Charles Sanders Peirce would argue, we can create predictive value for the virtual through analysis of the infrastructure of the virtual (the lake) and an understanding of the sign (the piece of wood). By studying the lake we can create a mapping of currents and flow, and predict how the piece of wood would be affected by them, and therefore predict the direction in which the wood would float. The parasitic aspect of design would be the changing of currents, leading the wood (the sign), in a new direction. This is not to say that graphic design is the design and creation of infrastructure. However, graphic design is an element that already exists within an infrastructure, in which it can aim to be unfaithful to and thus, alter.

VOIDS

I use my body to make breaks in the space between you and I that can then be interpreted as utterances, if you understand the methodology I have used to break up said space. I am therefore not the tool but the specific voids between fast moving particles

that the tool has created. I am a methodology for these instances of action. I reject notions of the cyborg or the post-human because I reject the duality of humanness and technological. I am a technology unto itself. I am a grammar. If you understand my ontology you can understand the specificity of the length of voids and the motion of the air between us. If you can understand the currents of my language and instances of action, that serve as indexes, you can future-cast almost anything about me. You can learn to use them yourself and become an indecipherable double. Not just a variation, since the body only serves as an indexical trace of the act of sound and wave making, but another me. Perhaps you can be me better than I. Of course, that is the purpose of creating such grammars, to weed out the incoherent to create the most elegant fluidity. We aim for affluence and a finer, more beautiful language. I am more me than I, or you are your. The cynic wrongfully says we do so for the pithy desire to see ourselves replicated and made eternal. They do not understand the self, they only see it as differential tools in an arms race, they only see that passive index not the product

of its labour and use. Not the brush, but movement through space it takes to create the referent known as a stroke. That which can scarcely be quantified or predicted by its ontology. Not the log or the lake but the currents that carry it. Not the input or the response but the virtual liminal space between. The self uses the body to create instances of action as to be copied and to eliminate itself. More than pithy desires the self seeks absolution into the elegance and beauty of a collective grammar. To say we contributed to the everlasting global project of history and that we changed the very currents of space.

L O V E

Why do we connect with people at all? I guess I look at the internet, what extremes take place in it and what becomes normative, and view it all a hyperbole for all the little things, the fears and desires, we have inside. For me the rudimentary structure of the internet is a larger-than-life reconstruction of the ways in which the self is constructed. In that way, The Internet in itself is a personality which we can psychoanalyze no

different than any biological one.

The Internet finds joy and laughter primary functions of being, these things becomes hyperbolised ("ROTFL" and "LMFAO"). It experiences events with hyper-sensitivity making their impact and actions exaggerated to almost non-logical degrees ("literally" and "epic"). The Internet feels depths of anger and rage that surpass what is considered socially acceptable behaviour. The Internet seems to hyperbolise any thought, feeling, or statement that we use to judge humanness, excluding that last refuge of humanity that science-fiction and folklore have been enamoured with—love.

The Internet, or technology in general, is often viewed as a dampener of love or "true" love. Does the Internet feel love, as it seems to other emotions, in a hyperbolised state? Does it feel love at all? Perhaps it is in the neo-liberal love that floods the pages of Buzzfeed and Upworthy. Maybe it is just cynical, or willingly naïve, to not accept that the constant swiping-right of Tinder is not an accurately exaggerated form our love takes. Perhaps we are deflective in not thinking that the Internet's apparent lack or incapability for love is repre-

sentative of us. Or, perhaps, it is because love is something completely different than all other feelings—which lead us to not view anger and hate as intimate of reactions as love. It is as if we are layered and closest to our core is Love where very few things in this world ever get sanctuary. We build it up and safe guard it on all fronts, for Love is the most precious, most protected, most pure and most irrationally human.

V.

FROM THE MIDDLE

"Playing" is not simply a pastime, it is the primordial basis of imagination and creation. Truth be told, *Homo Ludens* (Those who Play) are simultaneously *Homo Faber* (Those who Create). Even if the earth were stripped of life and reduced to a barren wasteland, our imagination and desire to create would survive—beyond survival, it would provide hope that flowers may one day bloom again. Through the invention of play, our new evolution awaits.
— Hideo Kojima, statement on Kojima Productions (2015)

When I was first coming into graphic design I was trying to discover graphic design's place within culture and discourse. Admittedly, in my master's application I even stated that I was unsure of my place in culture as a producer, interpreter, disseminator and consumer—I wanted to discover where in the process of the proliferating a discourse the designer laid. It was early on into my MFA that I reframed the question within the model of semiotic relation with the text *The Parasite*. Within this model I asked, in which part does the designer act. While the most apparent answer is likely the most true, that the designer acts within the encoding phase—taking content/a message, the designer's act is to codify it so it can be decoded by a target audience. Dismayed with this understanding of the profession I am in, I asked whether it is possible for design to act within the middle of the relation, if design can be the noise that disrupts the channel giving birth to new understandings and meanings without rewriting the content. To me, it means, to act upon what is there, what is already prevalent and evident in the world, some of which is far out of our means to rewrite or re-codify, and still use it to give rise to alternative readings.

It is this middle ground which I have found as a comfortable place of play, exploration, and motive. I do not think of the term "middle" politically as it is often used, in reference to the middle class or centrism. More ideologically, the middle is the part where the structuralist binary frameworks break down. The middle is gender-fluidity, it is experiments in anarcho-capitalism and libertarian Marxism, it is quantum uncertainty being both and nothing, it is post-structuralist in nature but does not deny standing structures but defies them by challenging their limitations and definitions.

Beginning my second and final year of my MFA, I met with three critics and professors to go over my work to begin the process of writing my thesis and synthesizing my body of work into a coherent whole. The first critic looked at my work and saw it on its aesthetic level. Being an old modernist himself, the critic told me he saw my work as

either clean, classic modernism, or in other instances it was chaotic post-modernism. Which side do I see myself on, he asked me?

The second critic looked at my work and tried to understand the type of design I want to be making, she was interested in the form of practice I wanted to establish for myself. To her, she saw my work in two ways, either it was very practical work, providing a service, making publications and such, or it was theoretical, driven by my own research and the design served as a form of exploration for my own thoughts. Both are existing models for practice that have worked well but she felt I must enjoy doing one type of work over the other. Which do you prefer, she asked me?

The third critic was a professor I had taken a class with before and was currently enrolled in a class with. Shortly after having met with the other two critics I met with him to review what I had been working on, some completely abstract sketches of user interfaces. In this he was puzzled by the way I presented my work. As he stated, on one hand my work was fantastical but on the other I presented it in a hyperreal way. My work to him was trying to escape into the fantastical but it remained tied to presenting a hyperreal perspective of the world. This polemic seemed awkward and hard to place. So, how do you want to address the world, he asked me. And with that I had finished over my x, y, and z coordinates, the mapping of my work.

On my board that stood on my desk that I would face while working everyday I printed a chart where I drew out these polar coordinates, *Modernism—Post-Modernism*, *Practical—Theoretical*, and *Fantasy—Reality*. Alongside it, I a printed a second chart with the coordinates, *Fuck—Fuck*, *Fuck—Fuck*, *Fuck—Fuck*. Having been placed on, and asked to chose within, so many dichotomies fed the feeling that I was aimlessly working without a sense of purpose or agency. However I did not feel dismayed by it, in a way I was glad to have been in an area that seemed hard for critics, whom to me represented older ways of thinking and of design, to place my work within their understanding. I felt I was fucked with any side of the chart I chose but still forced to pick one, while simultaneously trying to

PRAGMATIC

FANTASY

MODERNISM

POST-MODERNISM

HYPERREAL

THEORETICAL

FUCK

FUCK

FUCK

FUCK

FUCK

FUCK
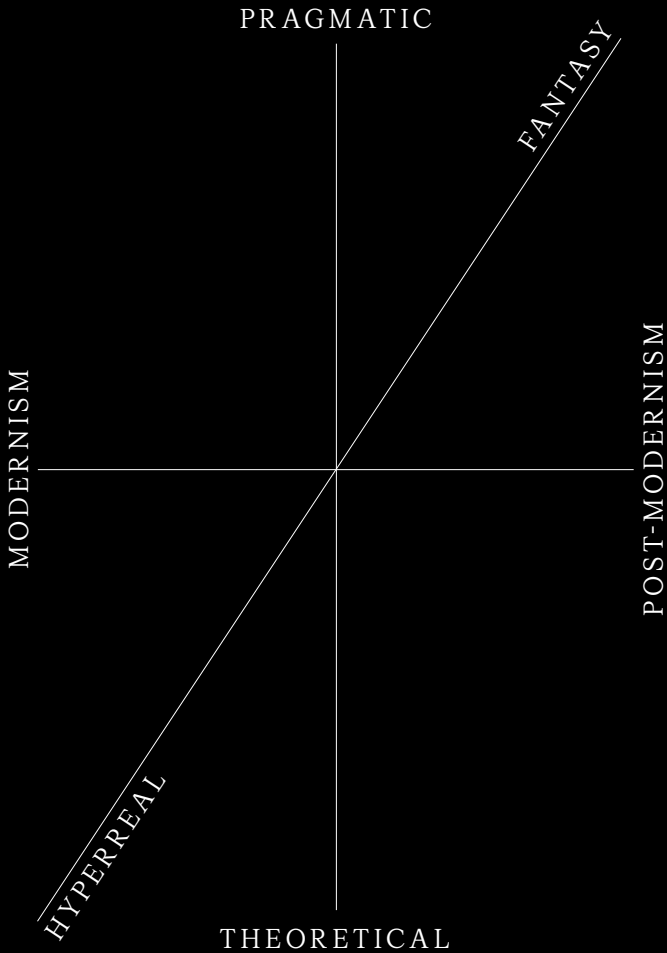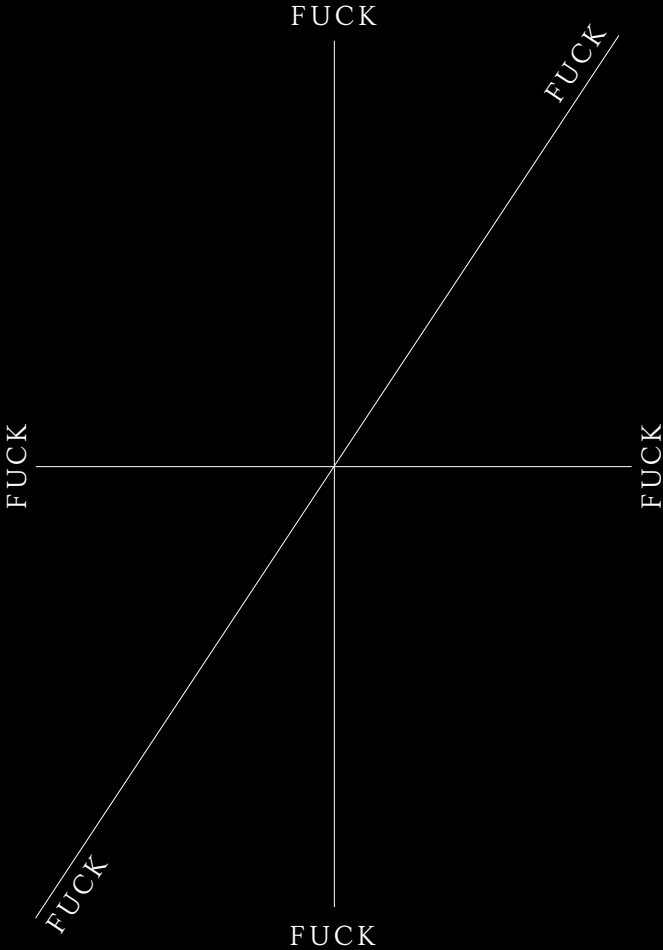
ignore binary ways of thinking. Then there was another option, deciding not to choose, to remain in the middle as a quantum uncertainty.

An early draft of an essay, I had started writing about half a year before, started with an analogy of a forest which we are lost in. We know we cannot stay where we are in the forest but have no clue which direction we should start to head in. In such a scenario, how does one navigate through the forest? This, for me, was a way of illustrating the beginning idea of subjective and multiple realities. In a way it is how the homo sapient started out, placed in an endless landscape of the Earth with no direction or purpose given. The beginning of purpose is the first creation and forming of the first tools. Perhaps not now in the technological age but as it was with the early tools, they were simple and served a straight-forward function—Heidegger would refer to these tools as being ready-at-hand. So the homo sapiens fashion the first tools which give the bearer of
those tools objectives, to use those tools to one's own benefit. Placed within the forest, we use the environment and the materials given to us to fashion our own tools to help us navigate through it. These tools are built to suit our own means and to benefit us in whatever we consider beneficial. Therefore, many different places within the forest would fabricate many different tools. If a group of people were all placed within the forest and told to find their way through it, each one would find their own different pathway out. That is the basis of subjective realities—all given the same material and environment, each defines their own rational method for navigation, leading them each to their own conclusion and end.

Being lost in a forest myself, the coordinates of; Modern, Post-Modern, Pragmatic, Theoretical, Hyperrealism, and Fantasy, were tools being offered to help me navigate. Each offering carries with it something programmatic that could be applied like a filter to my work as positioning to

give me a direction to head towards some priorly rationalized end. However, neither ends seemed to be specifically desirable. While each offer up beneficial ways of thinking, none were without some political dubiousness—such is the problem with binaries such as the American two-party political system.

To further complicate the situation in the forest, when trying to find the tools in which we navigate the world we live in, the tools have been becoming more complicated, their functions are changing from *ready-at-hand*, tools of with an apparent function, to tools which are *present-at-hand*, tools of observation whose function is not clear by its form. The tools we use are out of our hands completely in most cases now, we only ever deal with the interface presented to us, but the actually tool functions according to another's rationality and programming. If we look at Google as a tool we interacted with a minimalistic splash page. We did not fabricated the algorithm Google uses to filter its responses to us, we only ever give input into the interface and the tool functions out of our control to change the results we receive. In so, we have relinquished autonomy to define our own way through the forest, opting instead to trusting the knowledge, effectiveness, and agency of someone else's tool.

SITUATIONS

"Everything made within the Spectacle is of the Spectacle," it is a key thought I use to paraphrase the landmark text *The Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord—a long time idol of mine. Debord's "Spectacle" can best be understood as the totality of capitalism and what Debord was exploring throughout his career and the Situationist International movement was about whether it was possible to make anything outside of the Spectacle from within it. Is it possible to, from within a capitalist society, create something that laid outside the subsuming powers of capitalism? In a similar manner, or rephrased to suit my analogy, everything made from the forest is of the forest, meaning all tools created from once within the forest or of the same base

material and all are in parts representations/reconfigures of the forest. In the same vein, as the forest and Spectacle, Žižek speaks of Hollywood cinema saying that all films are representations of the ideologies under which they are made, therefore, all Hollywood films, even the seemingly mindless blockbuster films, are ideologues of American exceptionalism and capitalism. Back into relation to tools that are present-at-hand like Google, Facebook, and other algorithm-based services, they are ideologues of the culture they are produced under and skew all input given to them to fit within this ideology.

Everything within the forest, spectacle, ideology, is of itself and only proliferates it, so how does one create auto-nomy, their own way through the forest, or something that can challenge the confines of it? I do not propose a finite answer, only my own speculation—Debord himself for years battled with the problem and in the end grew dark, depressed, drinking himself into illness then commit-ting suicide, all to then have his anti-establishment work officially subsumed by the government by declaring it a national treasure of France (perhaps ironically, to keep his archives from being purchased into the libraries of Yale University). My speculation (as of my understanding at this present place and time) is that the restrictions, dichotomies and the ruling ideology of whichever for-est we find ourselves in can be challenged by remaining within the forest and working to populate it with tools and options for navigation, leading to countless dif-ferent ends and realities. I decide to try to not choose a priorly rationalized outcome in favour of endless and perhaps aimless population. In regards to my visual work I had been placed within a forest with defined borders, in lieu of choosing either border as my exit, I aim to remain within the forest. To make sense of this I begin to mix analogies, metaphors and models. If I am bordered by binaries or poles, say modernism and post-modernism, I aim to act within the middle as if it were the middle of a semiotic relation as discussed before. That is, I do not aim to be either modern or post-modern but to produce noise between the two, give rise to new understandings

of either or, incredibly idealistically, a new adjacent border that is neither modernity or post-modernity, but somewhere between the two. Subdivide the borders into endless extrapolation and endless possibilities, in such, I am not proposing the blind creation of something outside of the forest, Spectacle, or ideology, as that has proven to be a possibly impossible thing to do, but using the materials given to us within them to challenge their rationality and outcomes. It seems to reinstate the thinking of post-structuralism, but almost paradoxically does not deny or defy the structures but embraces their finiteness and products to reconfigure them to create countless other structures. Thinking of entropy, the same base materials, the chemical "standard model", and from it all things that can be, will be. From these same materials came our world, all the different forms of life, as well as thousands of other exoplanets that perhaps contain their own forms of life. Extrapolated even further with the theory of multiverses, where each decision produces another universe where the opposite decision was made, from the same standard model endless planets and universes have been created. If our world is subsumed completely by forests, it reversely creates the conditions for new worlds where forests have never grown.

When speaking about design I use to say that, to me, design was a means for dissemination. This involved what is a rather normative understanding of design which is a communicative vessel for language. Now, I am more inclined to say design is a language—or more so, a proposal for a new language. Design proposes a new way of speaking about its subject and, reflexively in that, it is always speaking about itself simultaneously. Lacan once said, "I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object", design perhaps is an object of language which we invite others to get lost in. My interest in this formation of languages is its use to speak about things that are not yet, things which are speculative. As we move on to new forms of communication, connectivity, and reality, at times, pre-existent language may not be adequate to discuss or stipulate on the things yet to come. I am interested in the forming of new languages that emerge from this fallibility. An exploration of language is a methodology for speculating on the coming future as well as a means to understand the past that

forms it—computers being fundamentally language processing machines. I believe that design as a language in itself is already present in current technological normativity—in the past, we have referred to them as skeuomorphic, flat, and now material. These are languages applied cross platforms and corporations used to homogenize content, or to put it another way, they interpret and translate many languages into theirs. Starting by examining these pre-existent languages and their affects on language, and the affects of language on how we connect, how we understand each other and ourselves, how we express ourselves, and how we emote, we can begin to look forward and create new languages (optimistically universal or unprecedently personal) to speak about the discourse of language machines.
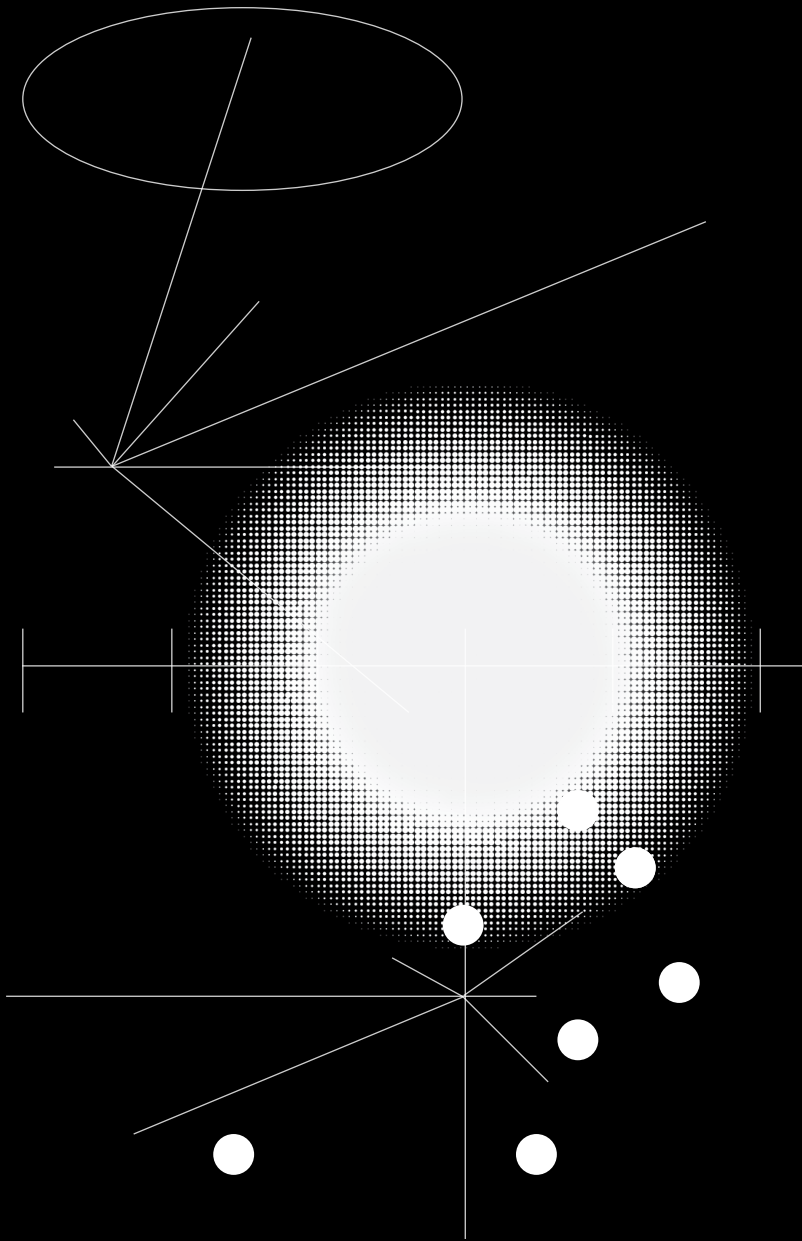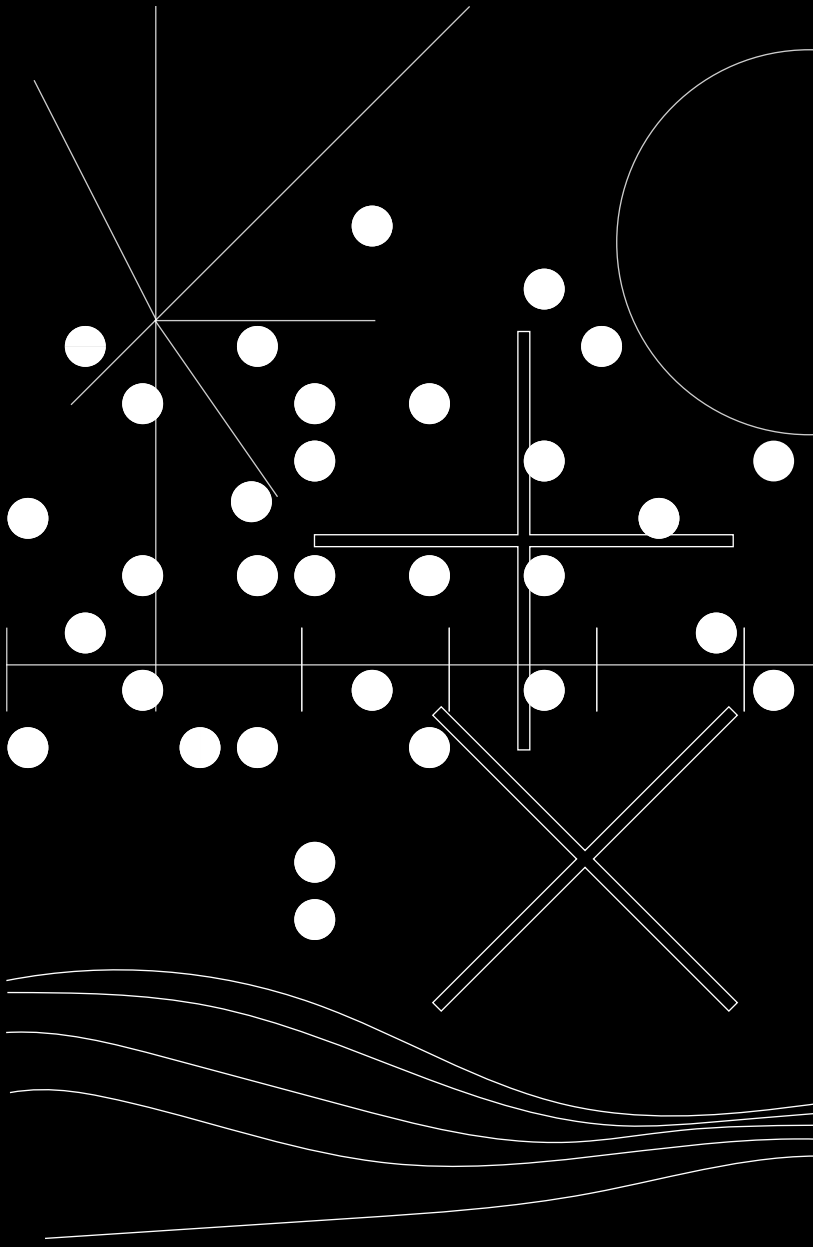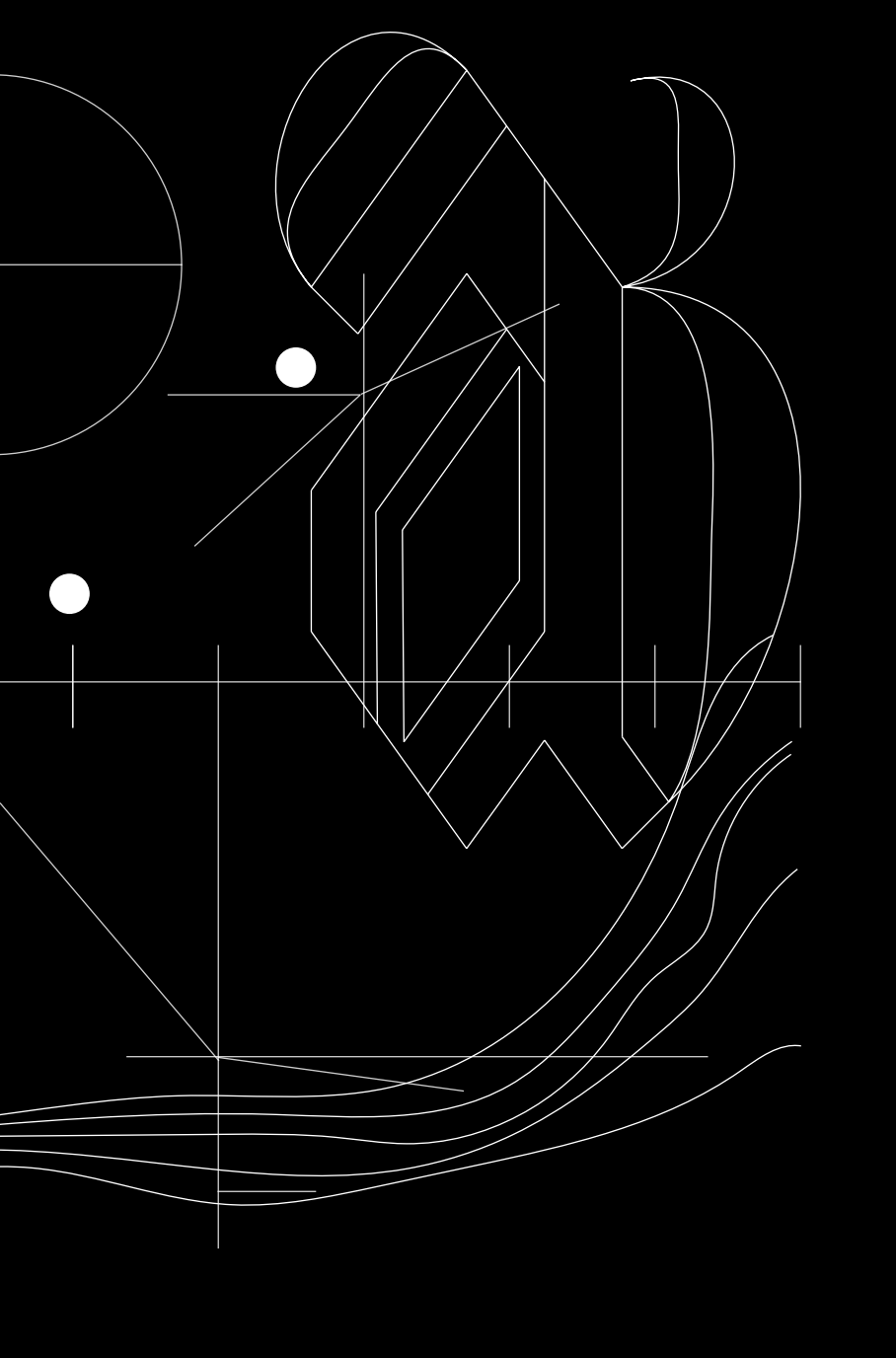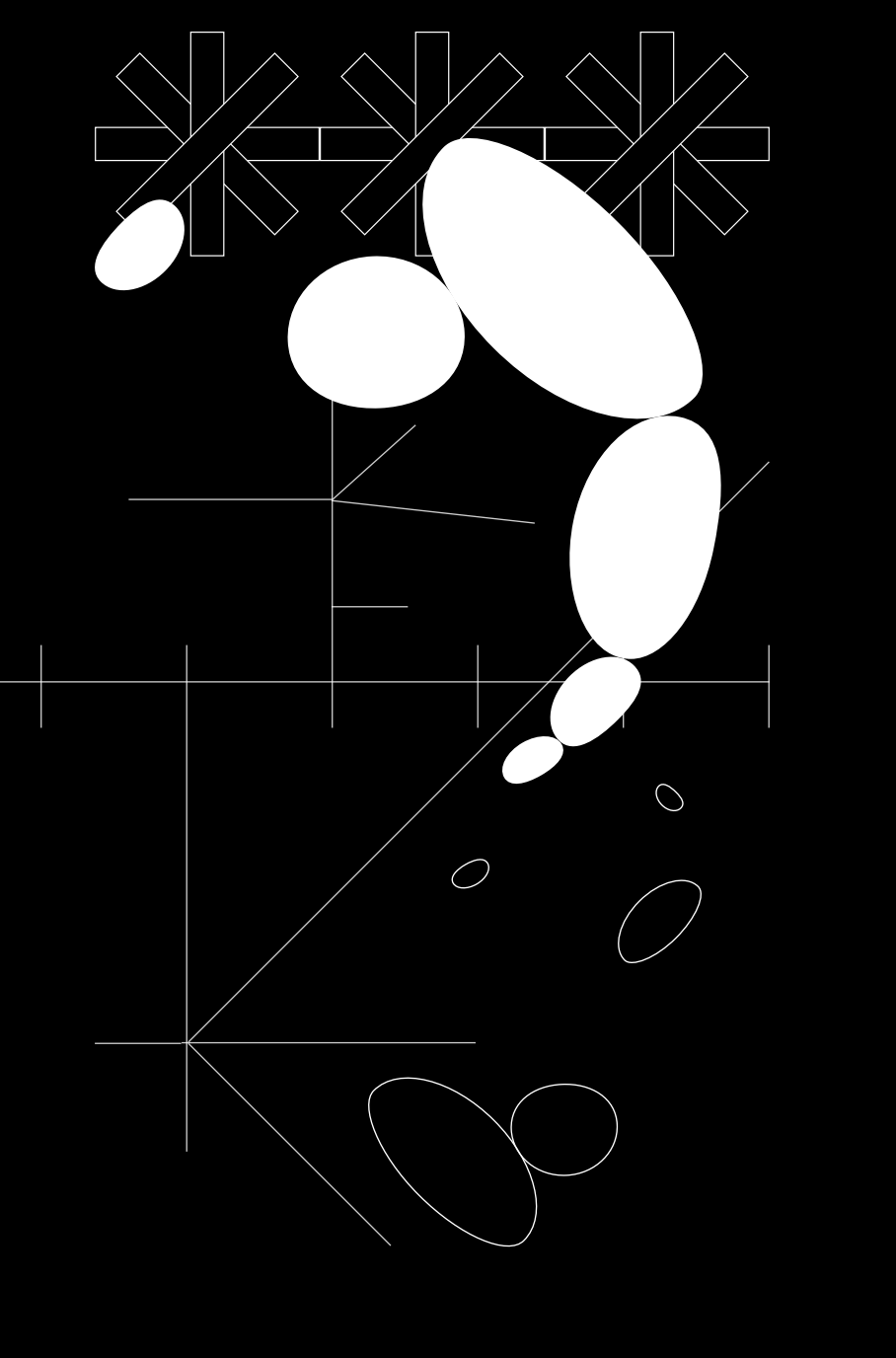
1. When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.
2. The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.
3. Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.
— Arthur C. Clarke's Three Laws, *Profiles of the Future* (1962)

The 2009 film *Summer Wars*[1] begins with a soft spoken, Siri-esque female voice introducing us to the land of OZ. It is a world that exists within the internet, built with skyscrapers, arenas, libraries, it exists as a three dimensional recreation of our world without the confines of natural law.

We already exist in a world of connectivity in which real life and real time become confused with virtuality. Connectivity no longer happens at the desk, through ethernet cables, nor does it require an act of plugging in. Our points of entry are everywhere, through our desktops, laptops, tablets and more. We carry them around in our pockets. They are a part of our TVs, game systems, thermostats, security cameras, even baby monitors. Recently we have started wearing them on our wrists. We feel obligated to maintain connectivity and begrudge when the last remaining barrier, the weakness of radio signals, denies us access.

However, recently Facebook, along with similar efforts by Google, have announced plans to overcome that last wall and bring the internet to everyone through mesh networking. A fleet on autonomous drones will fly above our buildings at near orbital heights, creating an interlocked network between them, a mesh net catching the globe within it. This net acts as a link to the internet, making it accessible from anywhere, regardless of signal strength, radio towers, and the physicality of our cities.[2]

More so than a physical one, a medium defines a semiotic boundary around its content. This boundary is instilled upon the activation of the medium such as the opening of a cover, the turning of a page, the click-buzz of a screen coming to life. From concrete poetry to the theoretical work of McLuhan, media has been studied through these mediums, that is to say, media or content was analyzed through the semiotic boundaries it places around itself. As we move towards a cybernetic

tele-connective age, these semiotic boundaries begin to disappear—insisting upon their traditional and continued understanding through medium leads to a dualist view of the technological versus the natural/biological. The harsh buzzing of dial-up connections served as the last standing semiotic barrier before the rise of instant and constant connectivity through radio wave networks. Media can no longer be defined through its medium but there remains the implicit need to create boundaries around it for its comprehension. Semiotic boundaries are then contrived through ethnography and sociology—whether through Susan Leigh Star's *boundary objects*[3] or Deleuze's and Guattari's *assemblages*.[4] This change in methodologies for defining media, once we can no longer define clear semiotic boundaries, lead to changes in how we define nature, human, and post-human. To borrow a phrase from Paul Virilio, we begin to combine the technological and the biological, down to our conception of time, in a *fusion/confusion*[5] that gives way to the invention of system theory, ecology and the anthropocene.

RADIOACTIVITY 109

Philip K. Dick once wrote a vision of the future in which human beings radiated information. Information existed as an aura around us, like radioactive or spectral waves, which could be seen with specialized tools to see.

Beginning with system theory, Buckminster Fuller's *synergetics* and chaos theory, the advent of new technological tools for observing the world led to theories and attempts to understand it quantifiably. Fuller penned *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*[6] and Steward Brand created the *Whole Earth Catalog*.[7] What these theories predicate is the ability to turn all natural things into mathematical and computer understandable data. Or, to put it another way, that all things can be reduced down to their observable outputs, and that all things do create observable outputs. Everything produces data, whether we have the tools to currently see it or not.

Our tools for observation are becoming increasingly more capable and invasive. CCTV cameras map the whole city. The NSA embeds Dropoutjeep on iPhones to intercept all in and out going messages and record keystrokes. The NYPD installs audio interceptors on top of phone booths and bus shelters. These technologies are not aimed at anything, but are there to observe everyone, everywhere, to not steal or smuggle data, but simply pick up the data we passively produce. Trapwire, a program that processes this loose data and boasts the ability to use it to predict a target's location and actions days ahead[8], is the continuation of Fuller's synergetic theory.

A discourse is being defined and, like most new theories, minor details change what exactly we call this thing. Whether we call it post-human, transhumanism, cyborgology, cyberization or simply the biotechnological, the discussion centres around a more literal redefining of what is meant when McLuhan said technologies exist as extensions of the human body.[9]

The way our brain and body functions is in the same way new technologies do, that is through the transportation, pulses and synapses of electricity. In so, electricity and information can be seen as synonymous, electricity is the physical form of information. This gives us a basis for a generalized theory of materiality, as the investigation of the interplay between energy and matter. As technology and media theorist Vera Bühlmann puts it, under this generalized materiality, "the capacity to store, expand, emit, and receive information now functions as the common denominator of all things existent."[10]

The extension of humans comes from beginning to see technology as a part of us. The furthering of the discourse is past the extensions of our ideologies and agencies as McLuhan spoke of it, but is in seeing technologies becoming a physical part of ourselves. While the "biohackers" and transhumanists aim to bring this one by accepting technology into themselves, materiality

passes over that duality of our physical bodies and techno-
logical ones, into viewing both as a common, open faced,
whole.

CREATIVITY

Once when asked what technology would look like in ten
years, Apple CEO Steve Jobs replied that it is impossible
to speculate that since the technologies we use to make it
will be invented in nine.

Technology improves and grows at a rate we call Moore's
law. Following Moore's template, as well as quantified
studies of the life span of a new technology (rate of early
adapters, improvement, integration and plateauing) it is
possible to speculate on the future of technologies. Follow-
ing these guidelines, we can predict the improvement and
integration of technologies that are just being presented to
us now, like virtual reality. 3D-printing is not necessarily
a new technology, it first was unveiled in 1984, it is only
now, in accordance to the rate of adaptability, that it is
becoming commonplace and utilized by hobbyists and
amateurs.

Currently, technology is pushed forward through mili-
tary funding. Lockheed Martin obtains one of the world's
first quantum computers and Boston Dynamics, teamed with
DARPA to create the most advanced walking and com-
panion robots. Thanks to leaks from Edward Snowden we
get glimpses at the technological leaps being made under
the control of the NSA. The future of technology is secretive
and we do not see its progression.

When we catch glimpses of it, like through Snowden,
and see the NSA's inceptors, super computers, tracking soft-
ware and even tools to blast targets full of radiation, we
are seeing technology whose history and trajectory is a gap
in our understanding of what technology can do. Without
a guideline for understanding, we can only speculate on
what exists, like trying to find the secret in a magic trick.
After all, following another guideline for prediction, Arthur
C. Clarke's third law of prediction states, "[a]ny sufficiently
advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

ENDNOTES

1   *Samā Wōzu*. FUNimation, 2009. Film. Translated to English in 2010.

2   "Facebook Lays Out Its Roadmap for Creating Internet-Connected Drones | WIRED." *Wired.com*. Conde Nast Digital. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.

3   Bennett, Jane, Vera Bühlmann, Graham Harman, Ines Weizman, and Andrew Witt. *Add Metaphysics: Essays and Assignments*. Ed. Jenna Sutela. Helsinki: Aalto U, 2013. Print.

4   Guattari, Fe, and Sylve Lotringer. *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews 1977-1985*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e); 2009. Print.

5   Virilio, Paul. *The Lost Dimension*. New York, N.Y.: Semiotext(e), 1991. Print.

6   Fuller, R. Buckminster. *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*. Carbondale: [Southern Illinois UP], 1969. Print.

7   "A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WHOLE EARTH CATALOG." *Tools Ideas Environment*. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.

8   "Stratfor Emails Reveal Secret, Widespread TrapWire Surveillance System." *RT USA*. Web. 3 Apr. 2015.

9   McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: MIT, 1996. Print.

10 Bennett, Jane, Vera Bühlmann, Graham Harman, Ines Weizman, and Andrew Witt. *Add Metaphysics: Essays and Assignments*. Ed. Jenna Sutela. Helsinki: Aalto U, 2013. Print.

Why would we obscure something? In a time when we over-share and live publicly, obscurity seems counter intuitive to the act of being social. We post, tweet, like, and fav to show our existence, to prove with clarity that we do exist and this is who we are. The hashtag is simply a way of cementing oneself within in a current space and time, giving one-self their own place within the zeitgeist.

In this new matrix, clarity is key. Universality is to speak to as many people as possible to improve one's odds of recognition. Obscurity in one way becomes a negative value. It individuates one, the obscured person is not a global person.

Obscurity in this matter can also become a hypervalued commodity. In a time when the private is public and global social networks reach us through what we carry in our pockets, being "offline" or an enigma is a very deliberate act. It adds it's own value through the creation of an aura through inaccessibility.

Obscurity can also add value through the creation of an insider. Obscure references, work, or jokes create a new class of those who

understand the reference. It creates an "us vs. them" dialectic that is sociopolitical.

We obscure to;

protect information.
protect ourselves.
distance ourselves.
keep secrets.
code messages.
explore boundaries.
politicize.
nullify.

NEOSELF I

I have to tell you something. While I am here I have to let you know who I am. Out of inde-cipherable chords I must make a noise to rise and fall in phase—to be heard, before I am lost in the deafening hum of D notes.

I have to tell you who I am. For I am not one but many persons. I am fragmented, reflective and representational. The work of a sparse collective of strangers who have unwittingly worked together to create myself. I defy identity and singularity. I am an extension of another's history.

I have to tell you something. I have to embed myself in order to leave artifacts that prove I was here. My heart did beat and sometimes raced. I was more than an idea but an ideologue bound to flesh and measurable systems.

I must transcode and translate myself for mechanics greater than my own that will carry on where mine have failed.

<div align="center">

NEOSELF II

</div>

I am not who you think I am.
Or maybe I am.
I do not think I can
tell the difference anymore.

     I am a series of instances, a collection of
     signs, that I create with a push of a key.

          I am primordial. I can change
          and evolve with any change of time
          or favour.

               I am a Rorschach test.

Do you see me? Do you hear me? Are my
words indexical, or are they just interpretents
of the unclarity which makes me?

I am code, past my DNA, to the ego.
I am learning to speak my language.

You insist it is good for us, you hear my voice
and feel closer, it's a transposition. But the
static artifact in yours make you incongruent.
It takes you away, makes you not a person I
know elsewhere but a simulacrum built here
and now, an artificiality we have made to
deceive ourselves of the deterministic divide
between us. You have become a bot of mine.

I come on late at night, I said I wanted to
be alone but I miss the hum of insistent
chatter. I unload everything that has been on
my mind in a broken string of non-contex-
tualized thought. I pause, let everything fade
to black. I can depress, anger, lament and all
these feel genuine, and when I see it I believe
it is genu-
ine. Praise however, praising and revering and

worst of all liking and loving, nothing seems more insincere. We crush, sexualize, fawn, idolize, but loving? In what sense? Do we still allow enough bliss to believe in the irreplaceable, the necessary sole other piece of us. Or do we have to adjust our understanding of such a thing because the great revealer has shown us it's true nature. It's ephemeral, transmutable, transplantable. Varied, multiple and spread thinly across a field. An embrace with four fingers and a singular caressing motion. A web of bots with built in failsafes.

I delete the thoughts that make me seem too distant for empathy, then putting my fingers to my wrist and touch nothing but cold stillness but you assure me my heart is beating as should be.

It maybe the last hurdle of fictionists and technologists. Something not transportable, not nodal in form or efficient in function. Unable to implicated, sexualized, marketed. Deemed unprofitable, against the general economy, unable be traded, bet on or against, or collected on. No futures but the future. The last(ing) absurd hallmark of a once great people.

And we will come together. We will form communes and connections. We will replicate. And we will endear, be content, keep, cherish, and hold together with no aim or reasoning, into absurdity, until we are no more. It is the best of what we can do, and is what we do best.

END

THANK YOU

00 Time, as a vehicle hitting a wall, coming to a sudden
end of horizontality, crumbles in on itself by inertia.
The debris of the wreckage shoots forward, through
linearity, to begin the expansion of time vertically.
From inside the disaster the crumbled and fragmented
remnants of time alter, bounce, and reflect the light
(observable reality) surrounding us. Every which way
we look colours reality varying shades from Reyes,
Ludwig and Sierra, in an ever indiscriminate flux of
difference. We are dazed and disoriented as we begin
our climb upwards into the rainbow.